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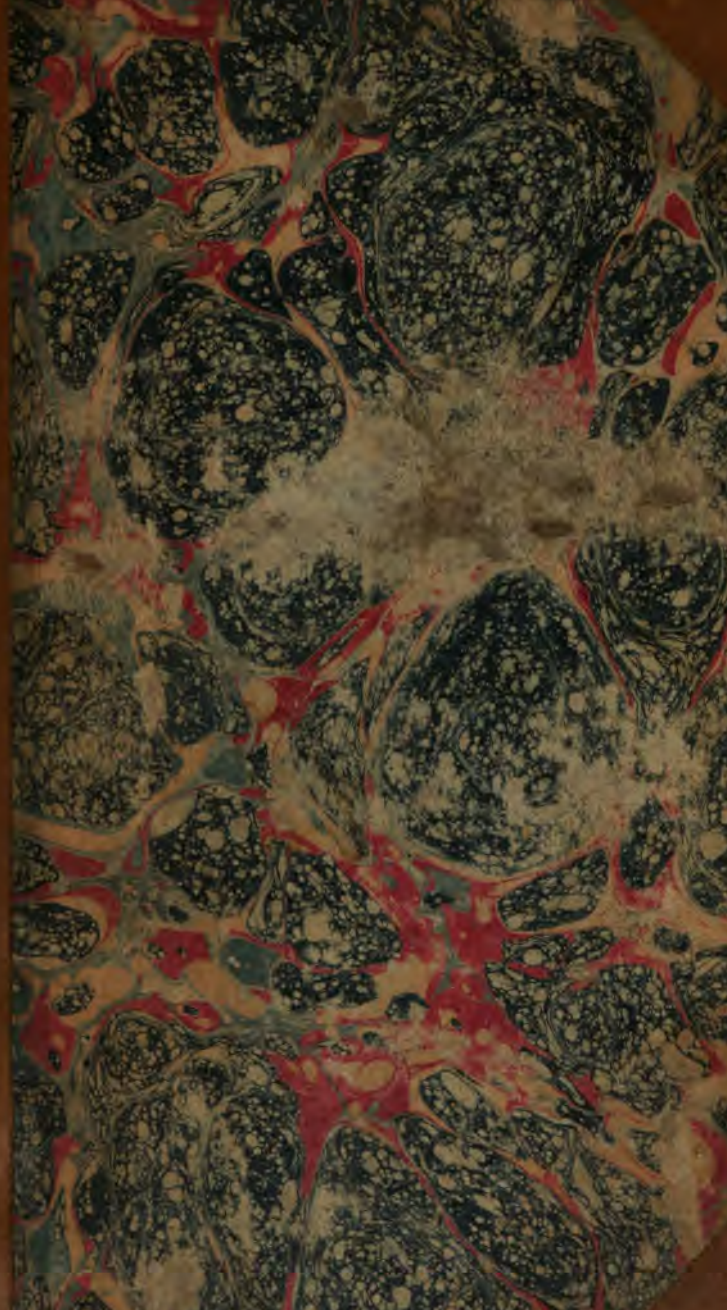
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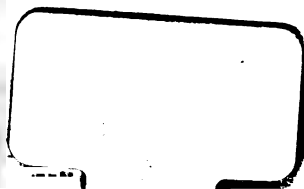
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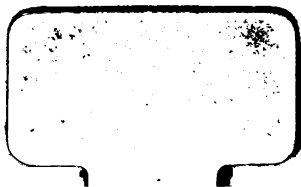


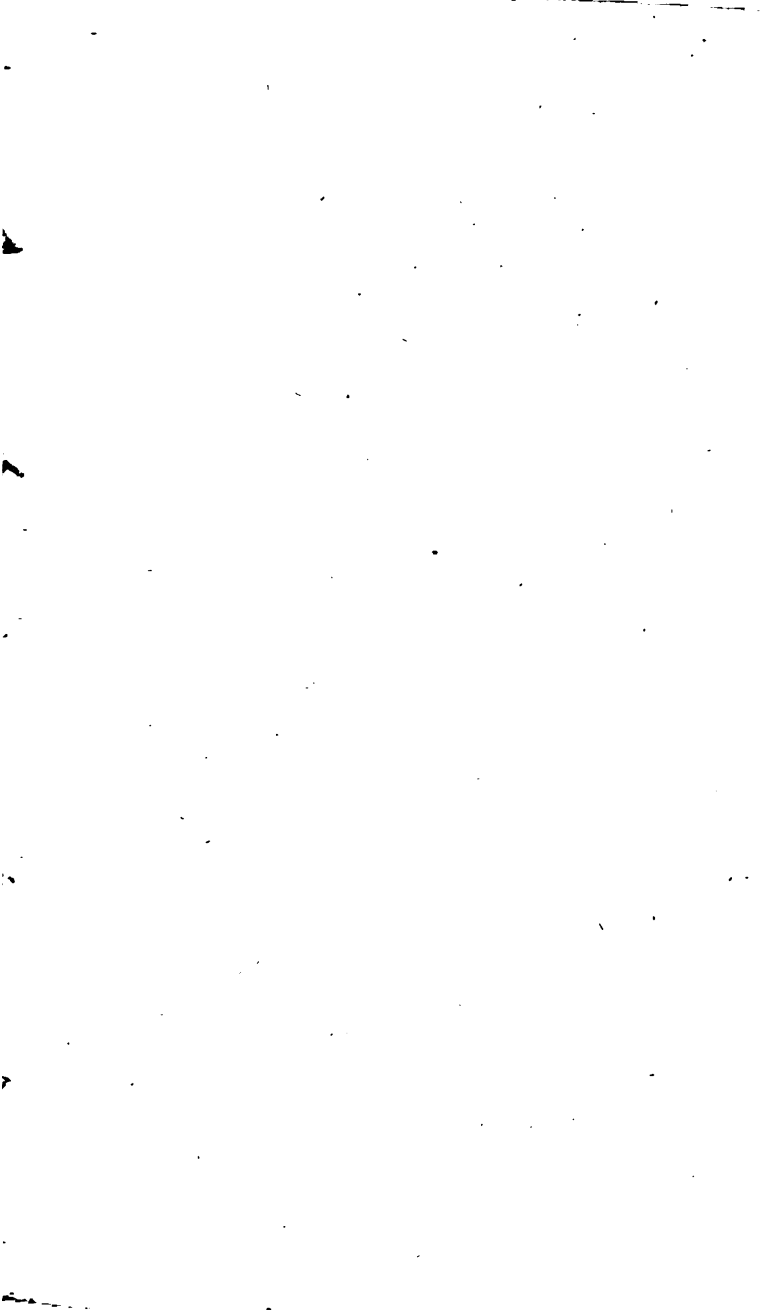
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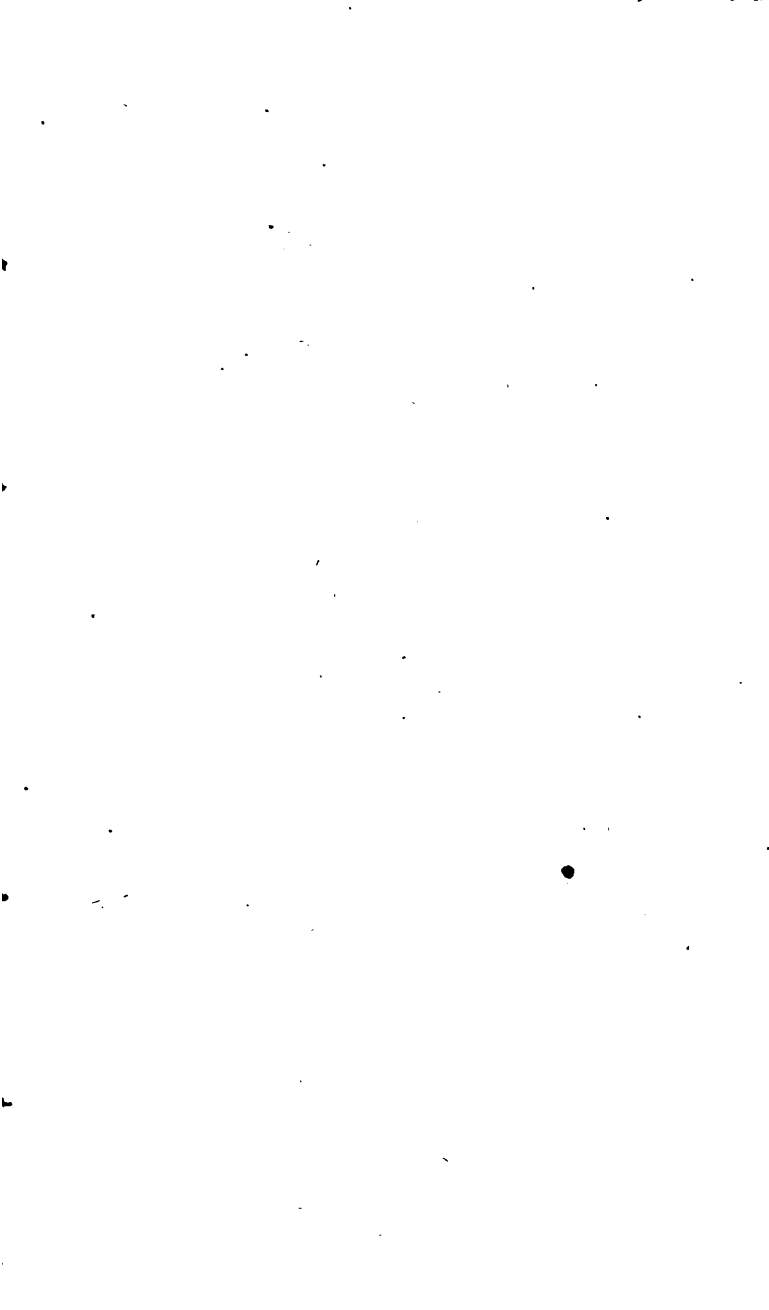


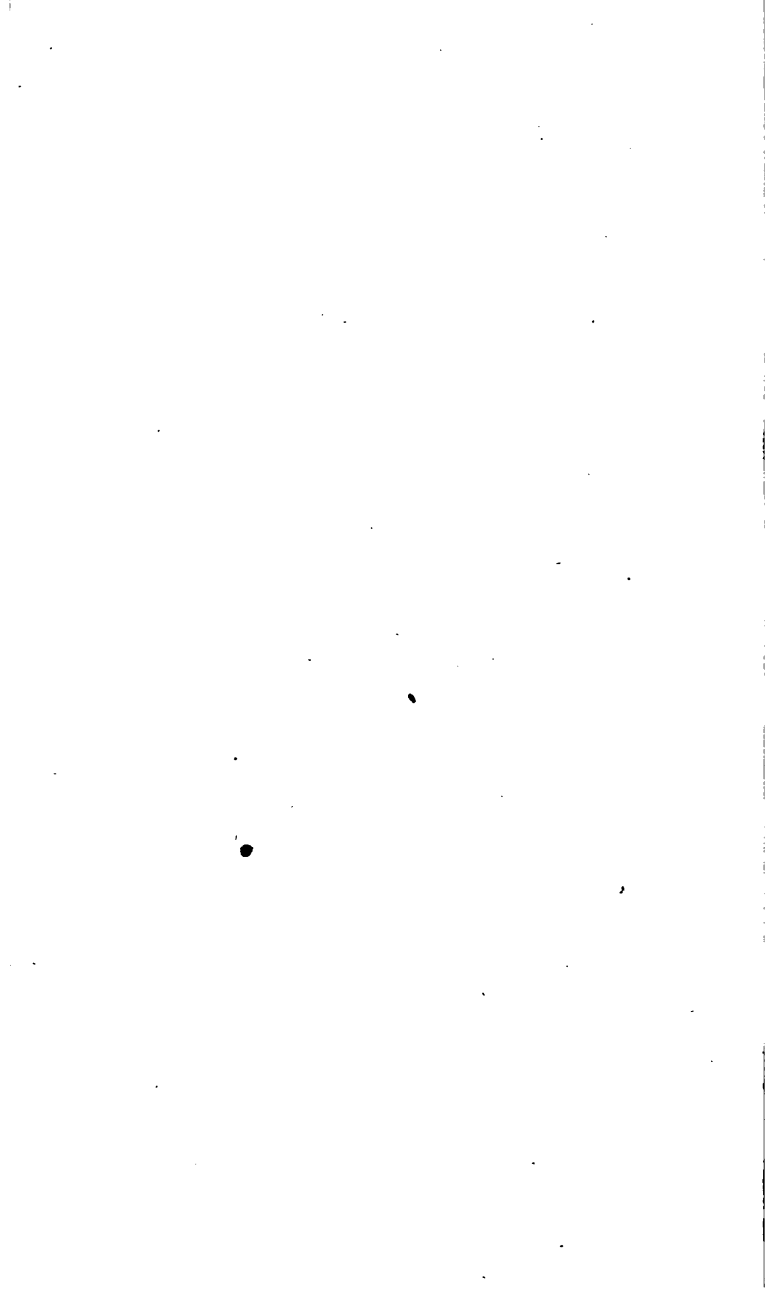


256 2. 16470









THE
HEIR APPARENT:
A NOVEL.

BY THE LATE
MRS. GUNNING,
Author of The Delborough Family, Memoirs of Mary, &c.

REVISED AND AUGMENTED BY HER DAUGHTER,
MISS GUNNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
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THE
HEIR APPARENT.

OUR hero, to whom every moment appeared an age, in which he did not enjoy the only society which had charms for him, found it impossible to pass the whole-day without seeing the beloved of his heart. After spending the morning with his aunt and cousin, in whom he found minds eager to give him every assistance that could contribute to his

peace ; he entreated their excuse for a short time, and, taking the well-known road to the parsonage, reached the garden without having engaged the observation of any part of the family. When he perceived his Alicia engaged with her little pupil, who, from the circumstance of being his niece, had acquired new ties on her regard, he determined not to interrupt their pursuits, but, hidden behind the shrubbery, to listen unnoticed to her harmonious voice, conveying, in the sweetest manner, instruction to the happy child ; which delightful ideas filled his mind : already, in imagination, did he behold her, when, as a happy wife and mother,

ther, she would employ her talents in forming the docile minds of her own infants. With what propriety, thought he, does she at once convey knowledge and amusement to that deserted little being, who, I am determined, shall ever continue under the care of her gentle protectress, when she is sheltered in my arms ! He thought how bright Alicia would shine in that rank which she was born to fill ; and he hoped that his mother, when once introduced to his fair bride, and knowing it was beyond the power of fate to separate them, would glory in a daughter whose native dignity must alone have proclaimed a noble descent, had not

the worthy Doringfield assured him she was of a family illustrious as that from which he sprung. His admiration was so engaged by the sweet historian, that, till the tale was finished, he continued in his hiding-place ; then, advancing towards the little group, he quickly found means to get rid of the sprightly child, and had the happiness of a long conversation with Alicia, who received the lord of her heart with all the captivating loveliness of unconscious beauty, artless innocence, and pure simplicity. Being resolved to avoid all contest with the countess of Ormington, Henry had been prevailed on to listen to the advice of his friends

friends in keeping his engagement from the knowledge of any one, until he presented Alicia, as Mrs. Neville, to his haughty mother.—

This plan was wholly foreign to his character ; and, on the first view, he considered it as disgraceful to himself ; but Lady Cecilia Fortescue at length succeeded in convincing him that the Countess would leave nothing undone to separate them, he yielded with reluctance to his situation ; for that Miss Arundel should be under the necessity of receiving his addresses in a clandestine manner, gave him the utmost anxiety, when his own heart convinced him

that she would do honour to a prince's choice.

Alicia expressed some apprehensions at the thought of the introduction which on the morrow was to take place between Lady Cecilia Fortescue and herself. These thoughts were interrupted by her lover, who exclaimed, "I love my aunt tenderly ; you must love her ; for, my Alicia, she is prepared to admire and esteem my adored choice ; had it been otherwise, the prejudices of my family should never have shackled my independence for one moment ; and should even my mother

ther prescribe rules for my conduct on this head, should she usurp any such power, that instant all intercourse between us ceases. To name the day which gives you to my arms, and, by so doing, convince me, that the wishes of him, who breathes but to devote his life to your felicity, have their just weight with you, and that your mind is superior to the weak fears of your sex."—"Should I refuse," said the blushing girl, "I must plead against myself; and, since you persist in giving your heart to her, whose only merit is in your partial estimation, and whose sole pride is that she is dear to you, take then the hand you

solicit ; and, Oh ! may you never have cause to repent the election you have made !” She spoke with energy, inspired by the feelings of the moment.

The enraptured Neville clasped her to his heart ; from whence he drew a small locket, which, he told her, contained a lock of her hair that he had procured from Mr. Doringfield. “ Propitious gift !” he cried, pressing it to his lips, “ may it ever give birth to love and joy !—it has been the companion of my bosom ; and ever will I wear it, till its lovely owner is my own !—You will not ask me to resign it, my beloved ?

loved ? but sanction my devotion by your permission to retain the precious deposit.”—“ Let it be my talisman,” returned she, with the softest smile love could furnish, “ to guard the heart on which it reposes, and in which is contained all that must contribute to my future happiness, as well from anxiety as from inconstancy.”—“ It shall indeed guard me from inconstancy, my only love ! and whilst you are safe, and fondly attached to your grateful Henry, he cannot know any painful sensations ; for to all, but the misfortune of losing thee, I am superior ; and death alone, I trust, can now divide us.” Placing, as he spoke, a ring on that

finger which is the first link in the matrimonial chain, Alicia, overpowered by a variety of emotions, dissolved into tears and tenderness at the prospect of such felicity, an attachment, such as Neville's, open to her view. "How," cried she, "am I blest! Am I indeed awake? or do I dream of happiness so transcendent, so exquisite? It is, I fear, too great to be continued."—"I trust not, my beloved," said Henry; "my heart can never change; suffer not a thought, so injurious to my love, to gain admittance in your breast. Bear up a little only, and a few days shall present you to the world as the wife of my heart, the
treasure

treasure of my soul ; depend on your own virtues and native dignity to secure you a reception due from my family to her on whom I, in future, depend for happiness. The accounts of Lord Ormington's health are lately of a more alarming nature ; and the ceremony which is to blend our fates in one, I hope will take place in the course of a week at farthest, or a brother's death may force me to perform a quarantine, which I feel the natural impatience of my nature cannot by any means consent to support. Never will I expose you to the displeasure of my mother, till you are secured by my protection against its effects ; her Ladyship

shall find that I can as boldly maintain my purpose as I have resolutely formed it : you will soon, my lovely Alicia, discover that I am impetuous and inflexible by nature ; and never will I listen to any argument urged against a flame like that which I cherish.”—“ You know I have promised all you can demand ; and never, I trust, shall I live to experience a diminution of that tenderness, on the continuance of which I have placed my only earthly happiness. Should these sentiments change, however severe the trial, I would rather never behold you more, than owe your attentions to any thing but unbiassed affection : far rather would I
 teach

teach my heart to be contented with
 your friendship ; nor ever would
 your Alicia upbraid you with incon-
 stancy, though, to survive the loss of
 a heart so valued, would be impossi-
 ble.”—“ Damp not the present mo-
 ment,” cried he, “ with these fore-
 boding tears ! Alicia, dare you not
 trust my love ? ”—“ Oh, yes ! ” she
 exclaimed ; “ but your mother ! ”
 —“ But, what ? my angel ! ” de-
 manded he ; “ I can but repeat my
 fears of the Countess, and all your
 friends, who may condemn your
 choice ; and, even guarded by you,
 I almost dread to brave their indig-
 nation.”—“ Have I not said, dear-
 est

est creature, though I love and respect them, I will not be the slave of prejudice? Of what advantage is fortune and independence, if I am not to select the partner of my life? to choose from the world the mistress of my soul? Trust, dear Alicia, to the heart which adores you, for constancy and protection.”—“ I do, I do !” cried the timid girl ; “ and never more will I express any sentiments but those of happiness and gratitude for the blessings I enjoy. But let us now return to the house : it is fortunate the ladies are so much occupied in their preparations for to-morrow, or our long interview

terview would have discovered more than at present it is proper they should be made acquainted with."

How differently had the moments been passed by those within the parsonage ! Mrs. Doringfield and Lavinia were employed in selecting and arranging those ornaments which were meant to adorn her who the fond mother expected would shine unrivalled in a multitude. Mr. Doringfield sat in one corner of the room, with his eyes fixed on a book which he held in his hands, while his attention was engrossed by the mortifying contemplation of the foolish

foolish vanity of that woman to whom he had, poor mistaken man ! confided the future comfort of his life ; and he felt, that the manner in which his wife was preparing to introduce her daughter to the notice of the world, would be the means of casting on himself the shadow of her weakness. His reverie was interrupted by Lavinia exclaiming, that she was surprised how Miss Arundel could be wandering about the fields and gardens with the little brat, instead of being employed in arrangements for to-morrow ! “ But,” cried the scornful beauty, “ she imagines herself so much superior to others.

others in every respect, that she can fix the regard of Mr. Neville without taking any pains about it."

To the noble, kind-hearted Doringfield, this speech, uttered by one whom he would have been happy to have considered as his own child, had she been worthy of the distinction, gave him the greatest uneasiness; it evinced, that the deformity of envy, which is so disgraceful in the bosom of youth, had gained entire possession of her soul, and would in time over-run all general kindness and noble sentiment, which, like gold, may be beaten till it covers an immensity of space; or spun into wires so fine, till it forms a

zone

zone to embrace the whole universe, without lessening its purity or diminishing its value. He replied in a tone of severity unusual to him, who was the mildest of human beings, " I would in future advise you, Miss Dormer, when it is your pleasure to make invidious remarks on any one, to choose some other subject on which to exercise your envious spleen, and suffer Miss Arundel to escape the honour of your notice. She is so highly gifted with all the virtues and the graces which can adorn her sex in the eyes of the rational part of mankind, that she will not need to intrude herself on their view. Unsolicited, the superiority of her person and manner will

will ever claim a decided preference from all who are acquainted with her merits ; and you should learn to consider, that the graces of person and the favours of fortune should be considered only as a decent varnish, which, though stamped with royalty, cannot alter the metal it is made of. It is wrong to fancy all is of a piece ; that this wonderful fine outside grows from the root of intrinsic prerogative, and is the unalienable right of our nature. In future then, Lavinia, learn to place less value on your own fancied perfections, and view, without envy, the superior attractions of another ; for, believe the advice of an old man, nothing is

is so destructive to beauty ; and, if you have an inclination to be thought handsome yourself, you must never refuse the justice due to another."

The expostulation, which her own conduct had thus brought upon her, was received with fullen indifference ; and the glow of indignation, which tinged the cheek of the doating mother, evinced her sensations at the rebuke Lavinia had so well deserved. Mortified vanity made her determine in her own mind, that her resentment should, at the first convenient opportunity, fall on the devoted head of the innocent Alicia.

During

During the remainder of the evening Doringfield spoke but little ; and Miss Arundel retired to her apartment, shortly after the departure of Henry, to contemplate at leisure her future brilliant prospects. The secrecy so necessary to be observed in the present instance, was the occasion of uneasiness to a mind that abhorred the idea of any thing like deceit—a mind which had been so early taught to despise all kinds of deception ; and she reflected, with regret, that artifice would be necessary to procure the gratifications allowed by virtue : she fondly anticipated the hour, when, as the declared wife of Neville, she should glory in
the

the title which would give her claim to his affection, and no longer subject her to the cold civility and ill-concealed dislike of Mrs. Doringfield and Lavinia. Thus, with every prospect of felicity before her, she felt as every one must feel who cannot reconcile their conduct to the strictest rules of moral rectitude ; for it was impossible to consider, that, by securing to herself the object of her tenderest regard, she was the innocent cause of a son's acting in opposition to the wishes of a parent ; nor did self-love or vanity delude her to view herself as totally free from blame ; and, after an hour spent in ruminations of a similar nature,

ture,

ture, she retired to rest, in order to recruit by sleep her fluttered spirits, to enable her to support an introduction to a part of that family of which she was shortly to form so distinguished a member. It was some time before she could forget her promised felicity : joy is as great an enemy to repose, as sorrow can be ; strange as it may appear, that such opposite sensations should cause the same effect.

At an early hour the ladies appeared at the breakfast-table, when the contrast was striking indeed between the two beauties in the choice of their ornaments. Alicia, rich in
the

the endowments of native loveliness, was more calculated to win the affection by degrees, than to seize the senses by force ; while the graceful and majestic figure of Lavinia was of that commanding kind which takes the heart by surprise, and leaves the judgment to make what terms it can with the senses. The modest, the retiring Alicia, would scarcely be observed by the multitude, whilst the irresistible figure of Lavinia took the imagination captive. Alicia's mild hazel eyes appeared, after the sparkling, raging black ones of Lavinia, like the mellow lustre of the moon succeeding to a day of resplendent brightness.

The

The drefs also befpoke the different turn of mind of thefe beautiful girls. Alicia was adorned by the hands of modefty and elegance ; while Lavinia expofed to the gaze of admiration, as much as the prefent unconfinned fafhion admits.

Miss Arundel was employed with her little pupil in the apartment allotted for her ufual morning occupations, when the found of wheels drew them to the window ; and the three elegant young men in a moment fprang from their equipages, and joined the party affembled in the drawing-room, who, with eager expectation, awaited their arrival.—

On entering the room, the eager lover sent his eye to ask if yet its chief delight were near. She in a moment appeared, with the little girl in her hand: her lovely countenance was tinged with a more animated glow, as Neville hastened to meet her. His speaking countenance, and his ardent perusal of her features, conveyed to her bosom that pleasing confusion which arises from the consciousness of being beloved, and made the eloquent blood to mantle on her cheek, at the visible air of tenderness which portrayed his whole soul as he took her hand. Her heart sunk on observing that he wore his arm in a scarf; and her
fair

fair face lost the luminous expression it had worn at his entrance. Henry, perceiving her inquietude, and guessing at the cause, immediately, in a low tone, assured her his accident was nothing; and requested she would not alarm herself, as the accident was not of the smallest consequence; and would occasion him an excuse for enjoying more of her society during the day; thanking her, at the same time, in the most passionate manner, for the interest she evinced towards him.

Mrs. Doringfield and Lavinia were standing by a window, absorbed by the admiration excited by

the appearance of the most elegant little carriage they had ever beheld, drawn by six beautiful ponies, which Sir Granby Darcy had ordered from town, in order to captivate, by the appearance of so much splendour, the heart of Miss Dormer, who, he entreated, would honour him, by suffering it to convey her to the breakfast. Consent was soon obtained to this flattering proposition; and Henry requested his friend Fortescue to drive Mrs. Doringfield in his curricie, for, owing to the unfortunate accident he had met with by straining his arm, he said it would be impossible he could have a sufficient command of the horses, which
were

were spirited ones, and required some address to guide. The elderly Lady, delighted at the adoration paid by the master of the fair equipage at the shrine of her Lavinia, suffered Mr. Fortescue to conduct her to the curricule of Neville ; and at the same moment Miss Dormer, presenting her hand to the Baronet, elated by the most enlivening hopes, passed the little group assembled at the door with a look of triumphant delight, and seated herself in the phæton, as a Goddess would have done in the car of the Gods, surrounded by adorers.

Mr. Doringfield beheld these ar-

rangements in silence ; and when the post-chaise drew up, which was to convey himself, Miss Arundel, and Neville, little Lydia exclaimed—
 “ Oh, this carriage is not one half so pretty as that beautiful one in which Lavinia is gone ; I wish, my dear Alicia, it had been you instead of her who was to go in it.”—“ If this is less elegant,” said Doringfield, “ it is more safe, my Love ; and I believe your kind friend would be sorry to make the exchange.”—
 The blushing cheek and sparkling eye of the grateful Alicia gave a full, though a silent assent, to this remark ; and, kissing the little girl, the carriage drove off, every individual below

from beating high with the various sensations by which they were agitated. Pleasure predominated. It is our duty to be gratified by that which is meant to afford us an innocent gratification, because it conveys to us the good news that our minds are rightly disposed. This was the situation of some, though not of all the persons who formed the splendid party.

During their drive, Doringfield expressed his regret at the accident which had occasioned the arm of Mr. Nevil to be wrapped in a scarf. Henry replied, with a smile, he had only himself to blame for a circum-

stance which, like Sancho Panca's stripes, had been inflicted by himself, in order to secure a seat in the carriage which contained his Alicia ; a fraud, which the strong temptation he ever felt to be in her society, must alone excuse him for having put in practice. Alicia felt highly gratified at this proof of his affection ; and the look of unspeakable tenderness with which she replied to it, repaid him for the pains he had taken to arrange his little cavalcade. Henry kept his eyes invariably fixed on her, with an expression of delight that spread a bright carnation-glow on her cheek whenever her averted glance met his.

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The conversation now turned on various subjects, in which the highly-cultivated and polished Alicia shone with a fund of good sense and information very rare in her sex; and Henry, the enraptured Henry, knew not which most to admire, her lovely countenance, her enchanting modesty, her elegant manners, or refined understanding; never before had he seen such an union of charms; and he thought himself the most enviable of man, that he engrossed the affections of such a heart.

On turning an angle of the road,
Henry pointed out, to the observa-
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tion

tion of his Alicia, Heathside, the
 residence of that amiable relation to
 whom she was that day to be pre-
 sented. The house stood on a hill,
 whence was visible a number of
 pleasing and picturesque views. Part
 of the domain was a park, covered
 with groups of the most flourishing
 trees, intermixed with a portion of
 wild and broken ground, which
 diversified with rough and ragged
 banks, rocks and crooked trees,
 hanging in fantastic ramifications
 down the hill. Immediately be-
 fore the house, one of the finest
 lawns imaginable spread to a consi-
 derable distance, bordered on one
 side by a thick wood, through vistas
 of

of which the tall spire of the parish-church, towering above them, produced a very striking and beautiful effect ; while, on the other side, the prospect furnished a mixed assemblage of rural and active scenery, the placid, and the bustling ; plowed fields ; the boat-building ; and husbandmen and sailors following their several occupations in the vicinity, occasioned by the Trent navigation, which produced a most pleasing variety ; while that beautiful river winds its silvery streams, amid luxuriant meadows, many miles each way, to which the park nearly reached ; while its variegated swells of finest verdure, adorned with beau-

tiful groups of noble trees, presented at once to the traveller's mind an idea of grandeur and comfort united in this chosen spot.

On Alicia's expatiating on the beauties of this delightful residence, the cheeks of Doringfield glowed with crimson, while tears stood trembling in his eye, as he said, in a low tone, as if unconscious he was giving utterance to his thoughts, " The very house and walls are daggers to my heart ! "

The words which fell from his lips were not intended to reach the ear of his auditors ; but Henry, with
eager-

eagerness, inquired the cause which could occasion such a conflict in the tranquil mind of his friend. " It is over now," returned the still agitated tutor. " The remembrance of days long past, days of happiness never more to return! which were once enjoyed by those friends in whose fate I was most tenderly interested, ever force themselves on my recollection, when chance brings me in view of that spot, which, a long lapse of years ago, was inhabited by the happiest family the sun of felicity ever gilded with its rays. Alas! many years have been filed on the register of time since the darkness of the night succeeded to their day of splendour!

splendour ! But let us banish a subject which ever imparts the most melancholy sensations to my heart.”

—“ Only one word more, my dear Sir,” said Neville ; “ Permit me to inquire to whom the estate belonged prior to its coming into the possession of my aunt’s husband ? I have formerly heard that some unpleasant circumstances, of a melancholy nature, had occurred between the family who then occupied it, and my grandfather, the late Duke of Malvern ; and, as Bellevue was bequeathed by his Grace to my mother, I believe the vicinity of its neighbourhood first introduced Mr. Fortescue and Lady Cecilia to the knowledge of

of each other, as she lived with the Earl and Countess till she was united to that worthy man. If I mistake not, it was a private marriage, entered into by the late Marquis of Desmond with the daughter of that house, which occasioned some unpleasant events, the nature of which I could never learn, as my mother always avoids every conversation which might lead to the subject of her unfortunate brother, the early termination of whose life was, I have been informed, occasioned by some heavy domestic calamities.—Fearing to renew unpleasant ideas, I have ever forbore to inquire into those particulars which could not fail

fail to produce the most afflicting remembrances in the heart of a sister ; but you, my dear Sir, can gratify my curiosity respecting a point in which my family were so deeply concerned, as, from your long knowledge of my grandfather's house, no circumstance respecting it can have been hidden from your knowledge. If you will some day favour me with the communication, I shall think myself most highly obliged ; as I really feel warmly interested in the history of this amiable uncle, who died while I was a child."—" At some future period your wishes shall be complied with," replied Doringfield, who again appeared to have

reco-

recovered his usual composure ;
 “ but at present you must pardon
 my declining to repeat events, in
 many of which I took an active
 part. Doubtless you have heard I
 had the honour and happiness of su-
 perintending the education of Lord
 Desmond ; and never did the dawn
 of youth open with a fairer promise ;
 but early, indeed, did he make the
 exchange ; for, though few his days,
 many were his sorrows ; and even I,
 who loved him with the tenderest
 affection, rejoiced at his removal
 from a world in which he never
 more would have experienced hap-
 piness. Life is like crossing a strait
 between two immense continents ;
 eternity

eternity before and behind ; the passage over is so short, that it is impious to repine if we are not so well accommodated on the way as others may be ; our principal concern is to prepare for a friendly reception on the opposite shore, and to make the best we can of every difficulty we meet on that coast which we are so soon to quit for ever."

The eyes of Alicia swam in liquid lustre at the griefs of one so nearly allied to her Henry ; and, to give the conversation a turn from the unfortunate Marquis, she said—" But you have not told us, my dear Sir, the name of the family who occupied

pied that charming place we have just passed, before it came into the possession of Mr. Fortescue?"—"It formerly belonged," returned Doringfield, "to a gentleman of the same name, and distantly related to the present occupiers, who, with a wife and one lovely daughter, blest the surrounding country in which they lived, by the exercise of every virtue that could adorn the most exalted rank. Hospitable, charitable, and humane, distress was never known within the circle of their inquiries; and blessings were ever poured on the benevolent and happy family at Heathside. Such they once were; but how sudden, how fatal,

fatal, the reverse ! Those friends who witnessed and shared in the felicity of this mansion of peace, lived to behold the destruction of all the blifs this world could afford ; and the only remaining prop which could have supported this ancient, though untitled domain, left a prey to the rude elements and boisterous tempests of misfortune. It was the death of the father of this martyred angel which caused his landed-property to descend to the male heir, who was the late husband of your aunt ; he had never been in habits of personal intimacy with his amiable relations ; and, on the decease of my worthy friend, instituted a suit in

in the court of Chancery, to prevent the large estate's being enjoyed by the heirefs of the late Mr. Fortescue: he succeeded, and she inherited only the personal property, which was considerable; and, being totally in her own power, it was by her bequeathed in trust for some purposes not generally known; and she appointed a friend to see those wishes fulfilled according to the directions given during her last illness to one who had the unspeakable happiness of soothing her hours of sorrow.— Adversity is the true touchstone of friendship: the man on whom fortune ever smiles cannot know by whom he is really beloved.

At this moment the carriage stopt at the place of destination, and, by so doing, put an end to the interesting conversation by which they had been occupied.

The sorrows of Lord Desmond and Miss Fortescue had so fascinated the hearts of the amiable trio, as to render them unfit to partake in the gaiety of the scene before them. The breakfast was splendid; and Mrs. Doringfield's party attracted universal admiration. "But your aunt," said Alicia; "when am I to have the felicity of being made known to one so amiable as, my heart tells me, Lady Cecilia Fortescue

cue

cue must be, since she is so dear to you?" — " In a short time, my love," replied Henry, " my aunt will join the party ; but she feared a whole day of exertion would be more than the delicate health of her Olivia could support, were she to venture into all the pleasures General Arnold has allotted for his guests ; hence she will not join the party until after the review, when my cousin will repay, for staying away from the breakfast, by the intended little rural dance to be given, after dinner, in the field : I assure you they are both most anxious to be known to her who will so soon become the companion of my life. Lady Cecilia

cilia has desired I will not formally introduce you till she has tried her own stock of penetration, by which she thinks she shall find out the object of my adoration, without being directed by me to the discovery ; for she declares, the praises of lovers are at least as much to be suspected as those in a funeral oration ; and she is determined to judge if any man can be trusted in the encomiums he bestows on the mistress of his heart.”

A smile played on the face of Alicia, who replied—“ I know not how it is that I tremble at an introduction to any part of your family ; yet it shall ever be my study to gain and merit their approbation ; and,

next

next to the continuance of your affection, their good opinion will be of the highest importance to my peace." Alicia looked more interestingly lovely than he had ever beheld her ; and he gazed on her with excess of rapture.

They now left the temporary building erected for the breakfast, and proceeded to the field, in which tents had been pitched for the accommodation of the company. She leaned on the arm of Neville ; and the fragrance of the morning-air increased the bloom of her polished cheek, and gave an indescribable animation to her countenance : in-

nocence and pleasure were blended
 in the smile of love with which she
 beheld her elegant escort, who, as
 they passed through the assembled
 crowd, saw all eyes fixed on her
 with looks of admiration. Those
 of a lower class, whom curiosity at-
 tracted to the spot, did not conceal
 their approbation in silence. One
 exclaimed, "She is as good as pret-
 ty, I will be bound for that!"—
 Another, "How sweet and good-
 humoured she looks!"—While a
 third cried, "God bless you both
 together! you are as sweet a pair as
 ever the sun shone on, whoever you
 are!"—The eyes of Alicia sparkled
 with sentiments of gratitude at these
 simple,

simple, but gratifying encomiums ; while Henry, with the energy of feeling to which his heart gave utterance, whispered his delight at the homage paid by the disciples of pure nature to the affability and beauty of his adored companion. “ Thus will it ever be,” cried he ; “ my sanguine heart tells me my path of life will be strewed with flowers : secure in your love, it will glide in celestial happiness. Devoted to her who charms even the most unpolished heart, how enviable will be my lot ! Oh ! my Alicia, did you but feel as I do, no doubts would distress your anxious mind.” — “ Doubt, my dear friend, is the companion of love ;

the more our hopes are fixed on one event, the more we dread its failure."

—" Ah! my Alicia, did you adore as I do, you would banish this pensive air: tell me, Whence does it proceed?"—The sensitive delicacy of the female heart is not to be explained. She looked down, blushed, and tenderly pressed the hand which held her own; and, whilst he regarded her with eyes beaming respect and tenderness, he walked by her side, in a silence more delicious than the most animated conversation.

They had now reached the field,
at the extremity of which was a

grove of old oaks, and under them was placed the tables for the dinner. The soldiers drawn out, and their arms glittering in the resplendent rays of a meridian sun, had a magnificent and delightful appearance. The gentle notes of the feathered choristers filled the air with ineffable melody: soon, however, they were overpowered by the clash of martial music, which filled the soul with the most exalted sensations, while the various military manoeuvres, with equal ease and agility, pleased and astonished the beholders. "How grateful," said Alicia, "ought we not to be to those brave men, who, for the defence of their king and

D 3 country,

country, sacrifice the domestic duties, the dearest ties, which bind the heart of man ! and never, surely, was monarch more deserving of a people's love than him who now reigns in the hearts of his subjects. Long may he be spared to them as an example of all which can adorn human nature, and add the splendour of virtue to regal dignity."

Mrs. Doringfield, entirely engrossed by the admiration and homage her fair daughter attracted, did not give herself much trouble respecting Miss Arundel, who, safe under the protection of Neville and her worthy guardian, felt no other
 sensa-

sensations but those of happiness.—
 Lavinia was soon surrounded by a
 number of the officers, who, allured
 by beauty and novelty, were paying
 her the most extravagant compliments.
 In the adulation she received,
 all thoughts of Henry were banished
 from her mind; while the respectful,
 yet affectionate manners so visible
 in his address to Alicia, convinced
 the observers that she must be in
 possession of distinguished rank, as
 well as superior manners; and they
 involuntarily paid her those marks
 of honour seldom offered but at the
 shrine of proud superiority. “Do you
 not observe, my Alicia,” cried the
 delighted

Henry, " the impresson you have made on the hearts of all beholders ? They find it difficult to restrain their admiration within the bounds of silent respect. I really believe I have been applied to a thousand times already this morning for information respecting you." — " I am no otherwise flattered," replied she, " at the undeserved attention bestowed on me, but as it may serve to do honour to the choice you have made ; for, rest assured, that while blessed with your approbation, that of any other must be indifferent to your happy Alicia." — " Heavenly goodness ! " exclaimed he in a voice sufficiently loud to attract the attention

tion of his neighbours, " who can sufficiently prize that purity of sentiment ?" The modest, timid object of his rapturous expression felt abashed at the regard thus drawn upon her ; and, in Italian, with a gentle smile, requested he would have the discretion to be a little more guarded in the extravagance of his encomiums.

At this moment, Mr. Fortescue, who stood near, and had been long gazing with admiration on her who had made his heart feel all the pangs of unrequited affection, replied, in the same language, " If you would not, dearest Miss Arundel, exhibit

the adoration of all observers, it is absolutely necessary you should screen that lovely form from the gazing multitude, and cease to give utterance to sentiments so refined!"—

"Ah, my dear Fortescue," cried Neville, turning towards them, "how came you to discover us in the crowd? I thought you had been with Mrs. Doringfield and Lavinia. But, pray, tell me, are Lady Cecilia and Olivia yet arrived?"—"To your first question I can only reply, that there are other breasts besides your own, my fortunate friend, who are capable also of discerning the merits of her who is the object of your adoration; and infensible, indeed, must those hearts

hearts be which are not attracted by an irresistible force to the spot which contains Miss Arundel. Now, as to my mother, I believe she is at present in the field, as I, some little time since, saw her carriage waiting; and it is more than probable that, at this moment, she is with Mrs. Arnold in the General's tent, where we are all requested to assemble prior to dinner, for which preparations are already begun."

They now hastened to join Mrs. Doringfield, whose pride had received the unspeakable gratification of hearing, from the lips of Sir Granby Darcy, that in a few days

he hoped she would salute her Lavinia as Lady Darcy. This declaration, made in the most unequivocal terms, absolutely intoxicated this ambitious woman with delight ; and, when Alicia joined her party, she appeared to regard her with more than her usual indifference and inattention.

On entering the tent, in which they were to wait the signal for dinner, to be announced by the military band, Alicia observed Mrs. Arnold in conversation with a very elegant woman, in whose fine countenance and graceful manners she thought she beheld a striking resemblance
to

to her Henry, and concluded it could be no other than Lady Cecilia Fortescue. She was accompanied by a lovely young woman of about seventeen, who appeared infinitely pleasing ; she possessed a majestic graceful aspect, a fine height, and the most expressive eyes ; whilst her dimpled mouth and smiling countenance shewed freedom and modesty sweetly blended together. Nor did the exterior of this charming girl make any promise but what her mind fulfilled ; she possessed a disposition constant, serene, and generous ; to which was united the most even temper, and a mind cultivated by all the polish of a world to which she

she had been early introduced, on account of her residence abroad.

Alicia turned, to Mr. Neville to inquire if her conjectures respecting the ladies were well founded ; but he had quitted her side ; and at the same moment she observed him join the little group, who now riveted her attention. After a short conversation, she beheld the eyes of all were fixed with eagerness on her ; and her heart beat with pleasure when she saw them rise and approach towards that part of the tent she was in.— Lady Cecilia, with all that easy condescension of manner so peculiarly her own, taking the trembling hand
of

Of our heroine, said, " I am ever
 pleased to gratify the reasonable
 wishes of my children ; and Olivia,
 from the accounts which she has re-
 ceived of you, Miss Arundel, both
 from my nephew and her brother,
 is most anxious to be admitted to
 the number of your friends. Will
 you, my dear, through the medium
 of Henry Neville, allow both mo-
 ther and daughter to be entered on
 so distinguished a list ?" The
 graceful girl replied, with modest
 diffidence, that the honour of her
 Ladyship's notice, and the friend-
 ship Miss Fortescue had so kindly
 proffered, could not fail to render
 her truly grateful ; her only fear
 originated

originated in the idea, that, on a more intimate acquaintance, the Ladies would discover she was more indebted to the partiality of her friends, than to any merit of her own, for the happiness of an introduction, from which she could not fail of receiving both honour and pleasure. Then turning to Olivia, she continued, “ Does Miss Fortescue ratify the offer of friendship so kindly made by Lady Cecilia ? ”— The sweet girl took her hand, and replied with an animated air, “ I have learnt of my dear mother to be sincere ; and, I can assure you, few circumstances will afford me more gratification than to be regarded with
affec-

affection by one I have been already taught to love, and to whose favour I hope soon to gain additional ties."

—Alicia sweetly thanked her new friend, while the blush of delight, occasioned by the hint respecting her present situation with Henry, mantled to her cheek. The Band now summoned them to the grove, in which the collation was spread; and Lady Cecilia, taking an arm of Alicia, kindly said she should not part with her again during the day, and that she must join with her Mrs. Arnold's party, at whose table she had engaged to dine. Fortescue undertook to apologize to Mrs. Doringfield's group, who, attended by
half

half an hundred beaus, were already seated, regardless of the absent Miss Arundel. Alicia was placed between her Ladyship and Henry, during dinner, which was served with every luxuriant delicacy art and nature could produce, to mark the liberal mind and elegant taste of General and Mrs. Arnold. They had taken this opportunity of returning the civilities which had been paid to them by an agreeable and hospitable neighbourhood during their continuance in a county they were now on the point of quitting; as the command the General held was transferred to one of more importance in a distant part of England.

Lady

Lady Cecilia gratified the ear of the delighted Henry with warm commendations on his choice; telling him, as it was her intention to have Alicia and Olivia as much as possible together, prior to that time when he would monopolize her to himself, it would, for form's sake, be necessary Mrs. Doringfield and her daughter should be presented to her; she therefore requested he would bring them together before the company separated. Neville was much pleased by this desire, which evinced so much consideration for his adored Alicia; and his heart grasped at the flattering hope, that, through the interposition of this kind
aunt,

aunt, his mother might be induced to receive a daughter-in-law sanctioned by her protection. At least, he was very certain nothing would be left undone, on the part of Lady Cecilia, to bring about so wish'd-for an event.

Mrs. Doringfield was gratified by the notice of one so highly respected in the neighbourhood; for Heathside, when inhabited by its amiable possessors, was still the little court of the county, as her Ladyship regularly kept a public day, on which occasion all that could contribute to the pleasure of any age was procured for the amusement of her guests.

The

The party now began to disperse, and Lady Cecilia was among the first who made the adieus. On taking leave of her niece-elect, she again renewed her kind assurance of regard, and promised a speedy call at Ashbourne. Miss Fortescue, pressing her hand with the affectionate freedom of long-established intimacy, told her, she should think the time long before they again met.

Notwithstanding this had been a day of triumph to both mother and daughter, they could not conceal their displeasure at a conduct so marked by a peculiar degree of attention, as had been that of Lady Cecilia

Cecilia and Miss Fortescue to Alicia. Sir Granby had left them to give orders for their departure, and Henry had attended his aunt to her carriage, by which means the Ladies were left alone ; when Lavinia, with a sneer of envy, observed, that “ Miss Arundel possessed the flattering talent of making herself particularly agreeable to old women and children.” Alicia, who was superior to a reply, rejoiced to see the gentleman approach ; and Sir Granby, seizing the hand of Lavinia, again placed her in the phaeton which had brought her to the review. The kind-hearted and disinterested Fortescue, giving up his own gratification

tion to that of his friend, once more undertook to escort Mrs. Doringfield, that Henry and Alicia might again enjoy the society of each other.

The worthy, sensible Doringfield, had observed the behaviour of Sir Granby to Lavinia; and, fearing she was likely to fall into the same snare which had been so fatal to her sister, determined, the first opportunity which might occur, to speak to the Baronet on the subject of his intentions.

Mrs. Doringfield did not think proper that night to inform her husband of the splendid offer Lavinia
had

had received, and intended to surprise him on the following day, when Sir Granby Darcy would himself claim of her stepfather the fair hand of his destined bride.

The next morning inquiries were made, by the family of Bellevue, respecting the health of the ladies ; with an excuse for not making their personal appearance, as Lady Cecilia had requested their attendance at Heathside, to give her their opinion of some improvements which had been made during her residence abroad.

The following day, Doringfield
resolved

resolved to have some conversation with the Baronet; and, for that purpose, he took the road he must come, should he be inclined to visit Ashbourne. He had gone but a short distance when he encountered the object of his pursuit, going, as he informed him, to the parsonage, with the hope of prevailing on Miss Dormer to take a drive with him in his curricle. Mr. Doringfield, giving his horse to one of the grooms, requested he would favour him with his attention for a few minutes: he then, in a concise and plain manner, pointed out the impropriety of a young woman, in Lavinia's rank of life, being singled out as an object

of notice by one in his situation ; and requested that, in future, he would forbear to create hopes it was impossible could ever be realized, and which would only serve to make her miserable, and to render her ridiculous in the eyes of those with whom she must associate. Doringfield would have continued, but was interrupted by the impatient Sir Granby, who, in a jargon of words nearly unintelligible, declared himself the honourable lover of Lavinia.

It is said that the dictionary of the Opera does not contain more than six hundred words ; that of the fashionable

shionable and dissipated world has certainly nothing like the number, or why do its votaries, by adopting so many strange terms, introduced on all occasions, render themselves hardly to be understood by the less-enlightened auditors? However, between oaths and exclamations, Doringfield had at last the pleasure of being assured he was on the point of being relieved from the burden of a vain, headstrong girl, on whom affection and advice were alike incapable of making any lasting impression; and felt sensations bordering on delight, that she would no longer remain a member of his family.

On their arrival at the parsonage all was joy, rapture, and delight. After some time passed in settling their future plans, Mr. Neville and Alicia entered from the garden ; and Sir Granby, with all the rapture of successful love, desired his friends would give him joy on his approaching happiness ; at the same time presenting Lavinia as the future Lady Darcy. Mr. Neville assured them he sincerely wished them every felicity ; and, with an air of gallantry, saluted the intended bride. Alicia would have embraced Lavinia, but was checked by the distant and supercilious looks with which her affectionate congratulations were received.

ceived. The disdain so visible in her manner was observed with indignation by Henry, whose warm and generous nature could not permit the object of his tenderest affection for a moment to appear subservient to the fancied superiority of arrogance and folly ; and, hurried on by the feelings of resentment, he for a moment forgot all those reasons which at present withheld him from making a public avowal of his intended union ; and, seizing the hand of Miss Arundel, which he pressed with rapture to his lips, he exclaimed, “ Allow your grateful Neville, my adored Alicia, in the presence of these witnesses, to avow the tender-

ness to which your virtue and your beauty gave birth, from that blest moment which first presented you to my sight !” The ladies were penetrated with astonishment at this unequivocal confirmation of all their fears, and appeared incapable of framing any reply. Fortunately for Lavinia, Sir Granby, nearly as much surprisèd as herself, was attending to Henry, and did not observe the tears of envy and malice which fell from the eyes of his intended bride. Henry, by thus having candidly avowed the affection in which he gloried, thought he had sufficiently mortified the supercilious vanity of the ladies. Alas ! little could he foresee that the
momentary.

momentary triumph he had secured to her unambitious heart would poison many months of her future life, and be the occasion of the most bitter anguish to both !

Alicia, in whose generous bosom revenge had never found a refuge, was hurt at the method her Henry had taken to announce the splendid prospect which awaited her ; but, soon recovering from the embarrassment into which she had been thrown by an explanation so unexpected, she returned, with native dignity, the compliments of congratulation the common forms of politeness forced from the deceitful

lips of Mrs. Doringfield and Lavinia, who, like good managers, foreseeing an advantage to be gained, resolved to counterfeit joy on the occasion, though very foreign from their hearts.

Those who would thrive in iniquity, scorn to be the slaves of opinion, or to be stopped in the progress of their pursuit by the want of assumed sincerity. For the sake of her amiable and respectable husband, Neville thanked her for the good wishes she expressed. Mr. Doringfield, who had till now silently observed the passing scene, with a father's fondness embraced and blessed

ed Alicia : Neville, with all the enthusiasm so natural to his character, caught the hand which clasped the white one of his love, exclaiming, " Yes, most excellent of men, God will assuredly bless the angel you have formed ! and it shall be the whole study of my life to render her happy, as she deserves."

It was now settled, that, in the course of the following week, Sir Granby should receive his bride from the hands of her father-in-law.

The ceremony was to be performed at the parish-church ; and, immediately after, the new-married pair, accompanied by Mrs. Doringfield,

who received a very polite invitation from Sir Granby, were to proceed to the superb house he possessed in Grosvenor Square. Miss Arundel and Mr. Doringfield were also included in the invitation ; but many reasons made them decline attending the bridal-party.

Henry had flattered himself he should soon call, by the endearing name of wife, her who occupied the inmost recesses of his heart ; but a letter which he received from his mother forbade at present a possibility of the much-desired event taking place ; for the affection he had ever felt for his brother precluded the

the

the possibility of securing his own blifs, at the moment when one so dear was hourly expected to deliver up his last accounts at the awful tribunal of his God. Alicia felt real concern at the near prospect there appeared of the Earl's dissolution: nor did the exalted rank and immense fortune which by this event must devolve to Henry, impart one gleam of pleasure to a mind which was superior to every distinction but the happiness she derived from the increasing tenderness of her Neville. She even felt a degree of repugnance at the idea of his ever losing that appellation under which she had first known and loved his virtues.

She also thought of her dear little Lydia, who, by the decease of Lord Ormington, would indeed become an orphan; and she hoped that, in the silent hours of meditation which the near approach of death must bring to every conscious guilty mind, that the thoughtless father would remember he had a child, the pledge of love from her whose spirit he would shortly meet in another world; and that the only restitution now in his power to make, for having, by his seduction and desertion, caused the unsuspecting victim of his crimes and her own weakness, to sink into the silent grave, the only refuge from the shame and sorrow his

cruelty had brought upon her, would be to recommend to the protection of his family the innocent little being to whom he had given life. She trusted the goodness of the Almighty would awaken a repentance in his heart, and grant him time to make his peace with an offended God.

Many and long were the conversations held with Neville on a subject so interesting to both; and she, with delight, heard him declare, that should his brother omit to provide an independence for his child, she should be considered as a daughter by him; and, he doubted not,

his

his adored Alicia would ever regard her with maternal affection, the interesting child, who appeared, by invisible instinct, to have thrown herself upon that protection from which she had already derived such numberless advantages.

A note from Lady Cecilia Fortescue announced the intentions of herself and Miss Fortescue to take their tea that evening at the parsonage, and to make their personal congratulations to the family on the approaching marriage of Miss Dormer. A polite reply was dispatched, expressive of the pleasure the ladies would receive from the honour intended them.

them. They accordingly arrived ; and the afternoon was passed with much satisfaction to all parties ; the gentlemen from Bellevue attended Lady Cecilia. A great part of the evening was occupied by music, which was proposed by Neville, to convince his aunt that the accomplishments of Alicia were of the first class, and that in every way she excelled most of her sex ; he also prevailed on her to gratify them with a sight of some drawings, which would have done honour to the hand of an artist ; and her ladyship could not refrain from expressing the pleasure she felt from the happy prospect which awaited her favourite,

when

when united to a woman in all respects so perfect, and so formed to constitute the felicity of any man.

Mrs. Doringfield, who did not receive much cause for hilarity in the visible superiority displayed by the modest unassuming Alicia, over the future Lady Darcy, proposed cards. Lady Cecilia replied; " I think, my dear madam, in such society as the present, we can easily dispense with an amusement which idleness and ignorance have rendered necessary. In my opinion, cards are only useful in those parties which neither know how to think nor how to converse: I speak this in the general

neral

neral way ; at the same time, I often play, and am willing to do so at this moment, if agreeable to you."

—" But does not your ladyship,"

returned Mrs. Doringfield, " find

them very great auxiliaries in mixed

societies ? In my opinion, always

speaking is as fatiguing as always

playing: for my own part, I hate those

companies in which we are only al-

lowed to utter bon mots."

The conversation was put an end

to, by the entrance of a servant, who

said, one of the grooms from the

castle had brought a letter, which

had just arrived express from Bris-

tol, and was ordered to be imme-

diately

diately forwarded should Mrs. Neville be from home. The agitated Henry hastily took the packet, which his heart told him conveyed the information that his brother no longer existed ; an intelligence the black seal and superscription of the letter too fatally confirmed ; and, with sensations of unutterable sorrow, he read the long expected, though afflicting accounts, which Lord Gifford, as a friend of the family, had undertaken to transmit ; that he was now become Earl of Ormington, his brother having departed this life on the day his lordship wrote. He requested, in the name of the Countess, that Henry would immediately
 set

set off for the Hot Wells, to give his orders respecting the necessary preparations for the removal of the body to the castle, where, it was her ladyship's wish, it should lay in state some days previous to interment : and he concluded his letter with many compliments of condolance, on the melancholy occasion which had thus unfortunately been the means of introducing them to each other ; and every offer of service in his power which could evince the share both his lordship and his family took in the present afflicting event. He added, both Lady Gifford and his daughters would attend their dear friend, with unceasing attention,

In that one point, if I did act the heroine, I must confess it would be with a coward's heart."

Lady Cecilia entering the room to speak to her nephew, heard the last sentence uttered by Alicia; and, tenderly embracing both, joined their hands, saying, "Amiable children! the union of virtue, and sentiments such as these, must form, between you, eternal bonds, which death alone can tear asunder. They will hereafter teach you to be a reciprocal consolation to each other in the day of sorrow; for human nature does not allow all our time to be passed in serene happiness. However,

ever,

felt at a separation which, though so short in itself, would appear an age to him, with tears trembling in her eyes, she replied, “ I trust, my beloved Henry will ever find in his Alicia a help-mate, not an incumbrance ! for never shall his distress be augmented by the fear that I shall sink under affliction : be assured that, I have fortitude to bear the ills of life, as well as patience to endure its common provocations. Trials must occur even to the happiest : it is the part of reason and religion to mitigate their severity ; and my philosophy will support every thing which can occur unless it were the loss of your affection.

In

“ Adieu, my only love, my idolized wife ! let the reflection that, when we meet again, it will be to part no more, soothe us in the hour of separation ; and be assured, that nothing but the duty I owe an afflicted mother should, even for a day, tear me from you, till I could present you to a family of which you will shortly become the most distinguished ornament.”

After a thousand promises of speedily rejoining her, the party set off on their return to Bellevue ; and, in less than two hours, the amiable, the affectionate Henry, had commenced his journey to the Hot Wells.

It

It is now time we should revert to some transactions which, during the last moments of the late Earl's life, had taken place at Bristol; for which reason we will beg leave to return to that period when the massive gates of Bellevue Castle opened to let through them the shadow of the nineteenth Earl of Ormington, who, reclined on a bed, and attended by Mrs. Parker the housekeeper, who had formerly been his Lordship's nurse, and his own valet, moved on at a very slow pace; but we shall leave the litter in which the emaciated frame of the poor invalid was placed, and accompany, with more expedition, his august mother, who, at

every inn where she stopped to change horses, announced to the landlord at what hour he might expect her son, giving, at the same time, proper orders for his reception.

On the evening of the second day her stately ladyship arrived at Clifton, the house-steward having preceded the family, had already prepared one of the best houses on that enchanting spot ; and as soon as she entered the drawing-room, her first inquiry was, what company ? that is to say, what persons of fashion were then at the Wells ? A list of arrivals was speedily procured, and, to her great joy, she read the names
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of the Earl and Countess of Gifford with their family ; a card was instantly dispatched, couched in the following terms :

“ Lady Ormington presents compliments to Lord and Lady Gifford ; it is with much pleasure she has just received the information of their being at present at the Wells, and flatters herself she shall be favoured with an early call. Lord Ormington, who is rather an invalid, has been ordered by his physicians to try the effects of the Bristol waters, and will, on his arrival, be happy to find he is likely to enjoy the society of Lord Gifford’s family.”

From the time his lordship had received the last accounts from Bellevue, he had given up all thoughts of Lady Georgiana Crawford ever becoming the bride of the present Earl; but, as he was an excellent calculator, a hint in Lady Ormington's letter had pointed out to him that her ladyship had two strings to her bow, and Mr. Neville was a good, collateral security for the peerage, and, if his daughter did but become a Countess, it was of little consequence to him by whom the honour was conferred.

A reply was soon returned to Lady Ormington's note; for it seldom
took

took his lordship much time to determine what would and what would not be for his own advantage ; that he would have the honour of making his personal inquiries after the health of the Countess in the course of the evening ; during that time, he called a cabinet-council with the ladies, whether it would be proper for them to be of the party ; however, from the first interview, *tête-à-tête*, the Countess begged to be excused, so did Lady Susan, Lady Rebecca, and Lady Flore, all but the lively Georgiana, who declared she longed to see her future mama ; this was, however, over-ruled by the higher powers, lest her presence

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would,

would, in all probability, interrupt the definitive treaty from being particularly entered upon ; and, as his little Lordship, after a visit of two hours, left the Countess in as high glee, it may be reasonably supposed that it had been finally settled that Lady Georgiana was to become the future Countess of Ormington.

Two days after, the poor invalid reached Clifton, and was supported between two persons to his apartment. His mother was greatly shocked when she saw his emaciated figure, the journey having reduced his shattered frame to almost infantine weakness, and
he

he now tottered on the brink of eternity. The most eminent of the medical tribe then at the Wells, gave it as their opinion, that he might survive two or three weeks, or, possibly, not so many days.

Her ladyship was electrified with horror on hearing pronounced so awful a sentence; even pride, for a while, deserted her breast, and she felt as a mother for the irremediable loss she was about to sustain. She now discovered that she loved him as a son, whom she was soon to lose for ever: she seldom quitted his bed side, and administered every medicine; but yet could not divest

herself of hope, even when he was given over by the faculty.

During that night he had slept some hours, and awoke much refreshed : he had, on the preceding evening, attempted to hold some conversation with her Ladyship, but his voice was too low for articulation ; he could only press her hand to his panting heart ; but the next day found him quite a different being, his hollow eyes emitted a faint gleam of their former lustre, and the hectic glow of his sunk cheek almost gave a promise of returning health. He again put the hand of his mother to his pale lips ; he thanked her for all her tender attention to him ;—“ and
you,

you, my good Parker," turning to the old housekeeper, " how can I ever sufficiently acknowledge my obligations to you ?"—" Bless me—my dear Lord, what occasion for all this profusion of gratitude ?—She is my fervant, and it is her duty to"—" Stop, my dearest mother ! you know not the nature of my gratitude to this worthy creature ; leave us, my good woman ; I wish to have some private conversation with your Lady."—" My dear George, do not exert yourself so much ; the physicians will soon be here, and will be agreeably surprized to find so evident an amendment in their patient."—" Oh ! my

dearest madam, I have that on my mind which, to impart to you, will be the only relief I can now receive. Poor Miss Dormer! what have I not to answer for, when I reflect on the seduction of that lovely and once innocent girl! My heart tells me I was her murderer; for did I not basely abuse her confidence, and bring shame and remorse on her head who might, but for me, have been, at this moment, the delight and ornament of her family? My child too!--but you will, I know you will, promise your repentant dying son, —for, oh my dearest mother! do not flatter yourself that I shall recover!—to be a parent to my innocent

nocent

nocent little girl ; love her for my sake when I shall be no more.”—

My dear son,” replied Lady Ormington, “ you may depend on my fulfilling your request ; but you have the consolation of reflecting, that the girl and her vain mother were much more to blame than yourself ; they wanted to draw you into their net, but found themselves entangled in the web they had spread for you. Indeed, my Lord, you are too serious ; you must not think of past transactions, they will retard your recovery. I believe that Parker has been canting to you, though my last orders to her were, she should endeavour, as much as

lay in her power, to keep up your spirits, and not get into the deplorable, as she is apt to do, if once suffered to prate. I wonder what business servants have to preach? I think it is mighty impertinent, and shall reprimand her folly.”—

“ My dear mother, you must not blame her ; the lessons she gave were for my eternal welfare. I have been happier, believe me, since convinced that a truly repenting sinner may find mercy with his God. It is that comfort which has renovated my strength. What a miserable creature, at this sad hour, should I be, deprived of this cheering way. What is pomp,
 2 grandeur,

grandeur, or the pride of birth? Can it save me a moment from the grave, or be put in competition with the hope that is held out to us?" His breath was almost gone, and Parker, at the moment, entered with some sago; for the good creature feared her Lord was exhausted by so long a conversation.

The physicians soon made their appearance, and each taking a hand, writing a prescription, and pocketing his fee, making the most obsequious bows, followed the Countess to the drawing-room. To her Ladyship's inquiries respecting her son's state, and observation that she

thought

thought him much better, they shook their sagacious heads, declaring, with much solemnity, it was a most flattering complaint; but that his Lordship had youth on his side, and, with that, and his former faint hope in general, he was cured.

Thus passed on hours, days, and weeks: but the blow, though suspended, was not put aside; for, at the end of the month, after his arrival at Bristol, the Earl of Ormington resigned his life, we hope and trust for a better. He made a will the day before his decease, by which he bequeathed five thousand pounds to his little Lydia, one thousand to

Mrs.

Mrs. Doringfield, and five hundred pounds to Lavinia, as a small compensation for the shame his conduct had brought on their family.

Henry, on his arrival, poured the balm of soothing consolation into the bosom of his really afflicted mother, who appeared most sensibly to feel the stroke which had divided her from her darling son; and he affectionately requested she would go to her house in town whilst the last mournful ceremonies were passing at Bellevue. To witness them would be more than her agitated spirits could now support. Her Ladyship, whose passions were violent

lent on every occasion, now appeared to resign her whole soul to the dominion of grief; she, however, agreed to his proposal; and, as the Gifford family were on the point of leaving Bristol, she settled it to accompany them to town; and Henry saw her commence her journey on the very morning he followed the hearse which conveyed his brother to the mausoleum of his ancestors.

During the time he had been absent, the marriage of Sir Granby Darcy and Lavinia had taken place, of which event his Alicia had informed him; for, during the few
days

days of absence, frequent had been the interchange of letters, which breathed the very soul of that affection with which their hearts overflowed.

As the family of Mr. Doringfield had been immediately informed of the bequest made to them in the will of the late Earl, the ceremony had been performed, out of respect to his memory, as privately as possible ; and now that the little Lydia had been thus publicly acknowledged by her noble dying father, and a genteel independence secured to her, she became of a sudden as much caressed as she before had been neglected
by

by her unprincipled grandmother and vain ambitious aunt, who, now that she had found other protectors in the family of her repentant father, was become of such vast consequence to the two ladies, that they both declared they found it impossible to leave the dear child behind, and would therefore take her with them to London.

Very much against the inclination of Mr. Doringfield and Miss Arundel, they beheld the sweet child fill the fourth seat in a superb new travelling coach of Sir Granby Darcy; while the female attendants of her new-made Ladyship and her gratified

gratified mother followed in a post-chaise equally elegant. On taking leave of Miss Arundel with every appearance of sincerity, they wished her happiness might be speedily secured ; and they promised to return to Ashbourne on the first summons they should receive, to witness her becoming Countess of Ormington. Neither Alicia nor her guardian regretted their departure, and the moments glided on with serenity and cheerfulness.

The comfortable little party at the parsonage was most days enlivened by an addition to their society in the presence of Lady Cecilia Fortescue

tescue and her engaging daughter, who, on a more intimate acquaintance with their future relation, had become most tenderly attached to her.

They were now removed from Bellevue castle to their own house, which had been for some time under repair, a circumstance which had occasioned their visit at the castle; but, now that all the long projected improvements had been completed, to the joy of the surrounding neighbourhood, they once more took up their residence at Heathside. It being very near to Ashbourne, they made daily calls at the parsonage.

One

One morning, this charming woman appeared in more than her ordinary flow of spirits; and she soon accounted for her vivacity, by informing Alicia, that a gentleman, with whom they became acquainted during their stay at Nice, had proposed for her Olivia; and, as it was a most desirable connexion, she had sanctioned his pretensions by her entire approbation; “and,” added she, looking at the sweet girl, “I have much reason to believe, your fly little friend did not wait for my consent to place her heart in the keeping of Lord Rusborough. Besides, it is more than probable that both my dear girls may resign their liberty

liberty on the same day.”—“ But your Ladyship must recollect,” returned Alicia, “ we must not tax the patience of Olivia and Lord Rusborough by delaying their marriage till that of Mr. Neville can take place. A late melancholy event must, for some time, preclude such a termination to our adventures.”—“ Why, my love, do you persist in calling your lover by his name, and refuse to recognize him by a title, which, owing to the death of poor George, is indisputably his right ?” — “ Ah, my dear madam ! that beloved name by which I first knew him, will ever be dearer to my heart than any title, however

however exalted ; and sincerely do I wish the late Earl yet lived, and my Henry was still a younger brother ! for, it is his rank I dread, lest it should be the occasion of fresh obstacles, in the breast of the Countess, to the marriage of him who is now become the sole support of an illustrious house.” — “ Has his increase of rank already rendered him less amiable in himself, or less tender towards you ? ” — “ Oh, no,” said she, in a tone of animated delight, “ he is, indeed, all the fondest heart could wish ; and I have only to regret I am not more worthy of the flattering distinction by which he honours me.” — “ Indeed, my
sweet

sweet girl, it must be the opinion of all who are acquainted with your merits, that you are formed to constitute the happiness of each other ; and my nephew must derive additional splendour from his rank, when shared with one so conspicuously amiable." They were soon after joined by Mr. Doringfield, who had spent the greatest part of his time at Bellevue in arranging some papers, which, at the request of his young friend, he had undertaken to look over ; as also to see that preparations were made for the reception of the inanimate remains of its late Lord, with all the pomp of funeral splendour.

He

He informed the Ladies the Earl had desired him to meet the procession twenty miles from the castle on the following day ; it was intended the corpse should lie in state two days, after which it was to be consigned to that small space, the last residence we take possession of, and which is alike the allotted portion of kings and beggars.

“ We shall then soon again be happy in the society of my Lord ! ” said Alicia, smiling at Lady Cecilia, as she for the first time pronounced a title, which in the eyes of most young women would have had so many charms. Her Ladyship inquired

why she laid such a stress on *my Lord?* "Because," returned she, with an air of gaiety, "I trust he is really and truly mine."

"Do you know, my dear sir," said her Ladyship, "this strange niece of mine has conceived an unaccountable dislike to the rank which awaits her? And I really believe Henry will have some trouble to prevail on the unambitious Alicia to become a Countess." "I confess," replied she, "my beloved aunt, since you permit me already to consider myself as belonging to your family, that I would, were the choice in my own power, prefer being the wife of my Neville, to any situation the most

exalted rank can bestow ; perhaps this taste proceeds from the same humble way of thinking, which makes me prefer a bed of simple cottage flowers to the highest cultivated parterres, and the soft sound of the flute to the crash of trumpets and cymbals ; but surely your Ladyship cannot deem me free from the most ambitious ideas, when I declare, that to be acknowledged as the favoured object of your approbation, and the friend of my dear Olivia, will ever be one of the highest wishes of your grateful, happy Alicia !”

The evening was spent by the little party in planning scenes of future happiness,

happiness, when they should be still more closely united by family connection, than by the ties of friendship which had already bound its silken cords around hearts so formed in similarity of taste and virtue, to harmonize with each other in every varying scene this transitory world affords.

On the day appointed the mournful cavalcade reached the castle, where the richly ornamented coffin, covered with crimson velvet, and plated with gold, was exhibited to a surrounding multitude, who, pleased with the pageantry of woe, filled the apartments, which, hung with black
cloth,

cloth, and lighted with a profusion of wax candles, excluded the light of heaven from the chamber of death.

Henry beheld all this pomp with sentiments bordering on astonishment, that it could enter the wishes of any enlightened mind, to exhibit, as a sight worthy the attention of a rational being, a moment so striking of our own insignificance, as the rich coffin which contained the mouldering remains of a fellow-creature ; but it was the orders of the Countess herself, who, even in the very first moments of her sorrow, did not forget to order that the funeral should be conducted with the most splendid

magnificence ; a note, in which the tenderest sentiments were expressed, announcing to his Alicia the arrival of her Lord at the castle ; but ardently as he longed to press her to his fond heart, the forms of custom must be complied with, and they loudly forbid him from appearing without the castle walls, till the last awful ceremony had consigned that brother, whose loss he truly mourned, to the family mausoleum, that silent repository of honours and hereditary distinctions.

Fortescue, with a disinterested nobleness of conduct which ever marked the superiority of his truly virtuous

virtuous spirit, had, during those days which separated the lovers, though within a short ride of each other, constantly been a daily visitor at the parsonage, to satisfy the anxious inquiries of both respecting the health of each other. On his first introduction he had drank large draughts of love; Miss Arundel was all he could have wished in a wife, and the fervent pleasure with which he listened to her most indifferent conversation, the sighs which incautiously escaped him, his frequent abstractions, too plainly pointed out that his heart had fallen the victim to the unassuming virtues, and unobtrusive graces en-

shrined in a form so lovely. Yet, as the affianced bride of his cousin, the friend to whom from childhood he had been attached, did the manly, sensible, and fascinating Fortescue now resign her : her future happiness was as dear to him as that of his beloved sister ; for never did he harbour a thought of invading the sacred rights of his friend, nor tempt the fidelity of a heart devoted to another. On these thoughts he sealed his lips ; he contemplated them alone, and alone acquired that self-command which restrained the effusions of a passion, pure, generous, and sincere. His mother, to whom, in defiance of his caution, every sentiment

timent of his foul had been discovered, secretly regretted that he had not beheld the object of his first choice, until it was too late to make her his for ever. As matters were now situated, she forbore to mention it even by a hint, as she well knew the knowledge of her having penetrated through his concealments, would only serve to increase his uneasiness, by their becoming the subject of conversation.

On the morning after the funeral, Lord Ormington had once more the transport to be re-united to his Alicia ; his sable garments conveyed, an indescribable interest to his features ;

and never before had he appeared so captivated to her partial eye.—Absence had augmented the fervour of passion ; and the day was spent with that unspeakable delight, which those who have felt an affection similar to that which animated them can alone conceive. He expressed the highest satisfaction at the affection his aunt entertained for her, and insinuated, that a few weeks only should now elapse, before she must be publicly announced to his mother as the future Countess of Ormington.—“ For,” continued he, “ softened as her heart is at this moment by affliction, I really believe that, as she loves me with sincerity, she will not, by useless opposition,

opposition, torment me in the point most essential to my peace. Nothing shall be left undone to obtain her consent to my union, to whom, since she has been deprived of her favourite son, I feel it doubly incumbent on me to behave with every mark of dutiful affection."

The inestimable Alicia encouraged him in his consideration for a parent's happiness; and told him, smiling, that as she had never seen him look so well as while his eyes beamed with duty to his mother, she would seize the moment to put the finishing stroke to a miniature she had begun to paint of him. "Ex-

press also, my adored Alicia!" said
 he, "the ardour of that passion I
 feel for the angel, whose precepts
 will give energy to every virtue of
 my soul. You, my tranquil love,
 though your virtues are too prudent,
 too reasonable and circumspect for
 the knowledge of a disposition im-
 petuous as mine, have established
 such an empire in my heart, that I
 will strive to imitate your modera-
 tion; and by observance of your
 wishes, and obedience to your will,
 render myself more worthy of my
 own, my gentle Alicia. Loveliest
 and dearest girl! tell me then, that
 the week after next shall give you to
 my arms! Even should my mother
 refuse

refuse her consent, and intend to sacrifice her son to proud, sordid, and ambitious distinctions, I would despise them all, and one smile of yours would over pay me for a frowning world.—When blest in the possession of your matchless worth, I shall embrace all that is generous, rich, and lovely !”

Alicia promised to accede, with a few amendments, to his wishes ; and the Thursday three weeks, it was fixed, should behold her the happy bride of Lord Ormington. The ceremony was to be performed by a special licence, after which they proposed proceeding to town, accompanied

panied by the family from Heathside, to endeavour to reconcile the dowager to the event, should she express any dislike to her son making his own election, on a point in which he was certainly most interested, How short, how swiftly, did the hours of this happy day glide away ! They took their tea in the garden, while Doringfield enjoyed the transcendent felicity of those most dear to him : Alicia played on the harp, and accompanied it with the silver tones of her melodious voice. The soft light of a new moon, shining with serene and silent majesty, cast its trembling rays on her lovely form, to which it appeared to give a thousand

thousand additional charms, and warned Henry that he had seven miles to return, and must tear himself from the idol of his soul. His horses were ordered round, and they walked together to the little gate which opened from the garden to the road ; she stood some minutes, her eyes fondly bent on the form of her beloved Henry, which the friendly moon still presented to her view. Before he turned the angle of the road that shut out the parsonage from his eager gaze, he beheld her still leaning on the gate at which they had separated ; and giving his horse to the groom, he hastened back once more to repeat his adieus.—“ Why
my

my Alicia do you remain alone, at this late hour, so far from the house?"

"I was not alone; your image is ever present to my sight: and could I leave the spot which yet presented my Henry to the eyes of his Alicia?"

Lord Ormington folded her with rapture to his heart, and in a transport of tenderness exclaimed, "A few days only shall elapse, ere I will secure to myself the unrestrained liberty of enjoying, with my angel, the calm beauties of such a night as this! When next that mild orb is at its present height, nothing but death will have the power of snatching you from the circle of these fond arms! But, now let me entreat that
my

my Alicia will return! I cannot trust you to remain longer exposed to the evening damp; remember, on the preservation of that precious health, the life of your Ormington depends!"

What love, what confidence at that moment, beamed from the bright mirrors of Alicia's mind! Overwhelmed with the most pleasing emotions at the tenderness of him who would so soon become her husband, she now affectionately bade him good night, and returned to join her venerable friend at supper.

It is now time to follow the bridal
party,

party, who, after a journey performed with the liveliest pleasure by each individual, arrived at the town residence of Sir Granby Darcy in Grosvenor Square. The magnificence of this splendid mansion, absolutely half-turned the vain heads of her new-made Ladyship, and her equally foolish mother. This lady, in her own estimation, had acquired no small portion of dignity by the brilliant establishment her Lavinia had been fortunate enough to secure. The family of Sir Granby Darcy hastened to visit the fair bride, anxious to judge of those charms which had been powerful enough to convert one of the most libertine young

young men about town into a benedict ; and he had the gratification of hearing it was the decided opinion of all to whom she had been introduced, that she would be a perfect comet in the hemisphere of fashion. On the morning after his arrival in London, he drove her in his curricule the circuit of Bond Street, St. James's Street, and Pall Mall ; where all his lounging companions assembled on the pavement, unanimously swore she was a devilish fine woman, and even surpassed in symmetry of form the divine lady——On the succeeding Thursday her Ladyship was presented at the drawing-room by the Countess of Bellmont, a near relation
 of

of Sir Granby's, and there received the stamp of fashion, by the buzz of approbation which followed her appearance : her dress and jewels were of the most splendid kind ; for nothing which money could procure was omitted by Sir Granby to adorn the idol of his own creating ; and when, from the window of their princely house, Mrs. Doringfield beheld the superb chair which conveyed her really lovely daughter to St. James's, preceded by three footmen in the richest liveries, her heart beat high with the uncontrouled transport of gratified ambition.

The little Lydia, who at first, with
infantine

infantine delight, beheld all the preparations with wonder and astonishment, soon began to tire at the splendour which every where met her sight ; and constantly inquired when she should return to grandpapa and her dear Miss Arundel. Her chief delight was in playing in the garden of the square ; and one morning, as she was running up and down the gravel walks, accompanied by a servant who had been taken purposely to attend on her, she saw a beautiful little French dog, that was following a lady dressed in deep mourning ; the child stooped to stroke the pretty animal, who being a great favourite himself, had ever evinced a decided dislike

dislike to all his Liliputian admirers, and, on her attempting to stroke him, he began to shew his displeasure at the liberty taken, by growling and snapping at her little fingers. The lady stopped on perceiving the encounter which had taken place ; and being struck by the extreme beauty of the child, who, from its being in the square, she imagined must belong to some family of rank, condescended to ask where she lived, and who was her mama? “ I live now,” said she, “ at that fine house of my aunt’s ; but I never had a mama in my life.” The lady smiled at her innocent reply, and Lydia continued : “ Your dog is very cross ; I wish
Miss

Miss Arundel had him, she would soon teach him to behave better; for she says, nobody loves cross things."

—"That is your governess, I suppose, my love?" said her new acquaintance, who appeared infinitely amused with the prattling girl:—

"Oh, no!" said she, shaking her little head with an air of wisdom;

"it is a very great secret, and you must not tell it to any body; but she is soon going to be a very great lady indeed, as great a one as my aunt is now; and I believe I shall go and live with her at the castle, for I do love her dearly; and I so long to see her again, and my dear Mr. Neville, who is very good natured, and told

me,

me, when he and Alicia were married: I should be their little girl, and then she would be my own dear aunt, and he my uncle."

The Countess of Ormington, for it was indeed herself with whom the child had thus strangely commenced an acquaintance, was absolutely petrified with astonishment at the variety of ideas which at once flashed on her conviction; and turning to the servant of Lydia, who followed her young mistress, she desired to know to whom that child belonged? The young woman, who had only been a few days in the family, replied, that her grandmama was a

Mrs.

Mrs. Deringfield, who was then on a visit to her newly married daughter Lady Darcy; and that she believed the child was then in mourning for her papa, who, she had been informed, was recently dead.

The idea of her lost son now presented itself to her recollection, with all the fondness she had ever felt towards him; and the tide of natural affection rushed to her heart in favour of his orphan, his acknowledged daughter; and, for a moment, she forgot the subject which had before so entirely riveted her attention, as she fondly caressed the

smiling Lydia, who seemed vastly pleased with her new-found friend.

Her Ladyship had often thought of the promise made to the dying father, that she would receive and protect his little girl ; but the time which had elapsed since his death had been so short, and the multiplicity of affairs she had to arrange had hitherto prevented her noticing the charge she had undertaken ; however, she had intended to do so on her return to Bellevue, not doubting that Mrs. Doringfield would gladly resign the infant to her protection ; but this accidental meet-
ing

ing had disclosed to her circumstances so extraordinary as were almost incomprehensible; and, for some time, she could scarcely believe her son to be the person alluded to, by Lydia, as her dear Mr. Neville. She determined to know the truth of her surmises before she lost sight of the innocent informer, for which reason she desired the servant would return home to her Ladies, with the Countess of Ormington's compliments, and inform them she should take Miss Neville home with her; and to assure them that she would return her safe in the evening to Lady Darcy and Mrs. Doringfield; notwithstanding the

late Earl had by his will acknowledged her as his child, her family had never yet ventured to call her by so distinguished a name ; and the woman, not knowing who was meant by Miss Neville, hesitated and expressed her amazement by her looks.

The Countess instantly guessed the truth, and demanded what name the young lady bore in Sir Granby Darcy's house ? " I am called Little Lydia," returned the sweet child : " there is no Miss Neville at my aunt's ; only Miss Arundel at grandpapa's ; and, if you mean her, she will never be called Neville,

ville,

ville, because he is to make her a very great Lady, with a very long name that I cannot remember."—

" Well, my dear, we will talk of your friends by and by ; in the mean time you shall go home with me ; and you, young woman," turning to the servant, " I desire immediately to give my message to the ladies, and bring their reply to my house, which is only three doors from Sir Granby's.

The woman, awed by the majestic Countess, did as she was commanded, and Lydia, ever fond of novelty, took the offered hand of her august grandmother ; vastly

pleased at the opportunity of improving her acquaintance with Azore, who still continued to view her with looks in which very little cordiality was visible. A message was immediately returned by Lady Darcy and Mrs. Doringfield, expressed in very polite terms, that the child was perfectly at her Ladyship's disposal; and, very much honoured by her notice, they requested to be informed at what hour the servant should be sent to attend her home?

Lady Ormington, who had much information to gain, afraid to lose sight of Lydia till she had gained full satisfaction on the subject which
 now

now occupied her attention, lest the innocent child should be put on her guard as to any inquiries she might hereafter make, declared her wish of keeping her all night.

The rencontre Lydia had met with was considered as a very favourable event, notwithstanding that, since the marriage of Lavinia, her mother had regarded both her Ladyship and herself upon a footing with all the distinguished characters with whom Sir Granby Darcy was connected. Of course, the profound deference with which she before regarded all Lords and Ladies had given place, in the mind of Mrs. Doringfield,

field, to the easy familiarity of fancied equality: consequently the delight she would formerly have felt at having the child of her unfortunate Lydia thus acknowledged as the grand-daughter of the Countess, was somewhat less rapturous than it might have been some months prior to Lady Darcy's entrance into high life.



During the hours spent with her Ladyship, the innocent Lydia had laid the foundation stone of future misery to her beloved Alicia; and the whole transaction was unveiled to her eager inquiries. By the child's replies it was not difficult to discover

cover that Miss Arundel was not so fortunate as to be any particular favourite of the ladies in Grosvenor Square, and the knowledge of this circumstance alone made the Countess determine to be particularly civil to them. This changed her first plan; therefore, at eight o'clock, her Ladyship's chair was ordered to convey Miss Neville to Sir Granby Darcy's. Before they parted, she saluted her little grand-daughter, and told her she should come and live with her; and, again kissing her, she made her the bearer of a very polite note, in which her Ladyship expressed her hopes, that as the unfortunate circumstance which had

occurred between the two families could no longer be remedied, all remembrance of the past might be forgotten, and that she should be happy to receive her charming little granddaughter from the hands of Mrs. Doringfield, with whom she wished to have some conversation on a very particular subject.

She ended her note by requesting that, in future, Little Lydia might be known as Miss Neville, the acknowledged daughter of the late Earl of Ormington; giving orders that the servant who attended the child home, should leave two tickets at Lady Darcy's door.

For several succeeding days, a most constant intercourse was entered into between the two families; whom chance had so strangely introduced to the notice of each other; and, to the astonishment of her household, who had supposed themselves quietly settled in town for the approaching winter, her Ladyship issued her order for an immediate removal to Bellevue; and, the same afternoon, the travelling chaise was ordered to convey herself and her new friend, Mrs. Doringfield, who, of a sudden, had become most anxious to return home; for, now that she had seen her darling Lady Darcy so comfortably established in her new situation,

situation, this amiable wife and tender mother found it impossible she could longer support a separation from her dear Mrs. Doringfield: for which reason, she said, she had, with inexpressible pleasure, seized on the obliging offer made by the Countess, of allowing her to occupy the vacant corner in her Ladyship's carriage.

This was the manner in which she chose to announce her unexpected return to the unsuspecting beings at Ashbourne parsonage; when, shortly after the return of Alicia to the house, on the very evening she had parted from her Henry at the
gate,

gate, as Mr. Doringfield and she were cheerfully conversing after supper, they heard the crash of wheels upon the gravel, driving round the sweep to the hall-door. A sound so unusual at so late an hour could not fail to surprize the quiet inhabitants of this comfortable little abode; but how was that surprize increased, when, on the door's being opened, they heard the shrill voice of Mrs. Doringfield, who was delivering her thanks for the accommodation she had received, to a Lady in an elegant travelling chaise, which the lights now brought forward, served to show the astonished party that the carriage belonged to the Countess of

of Ormington. In a moment the step was let down, and the door being again closed, the postilions drove off with a rapidity equal to that which had announced their arrival.

A servant had preceded her Ladyship some hours, to give notice of her return to the castle; and the Earl, on coming home from his visit at Ashbourne, was petrified with the unexpected information which awaited him, that the Countess would reach the castle late the same evening.

It is now proper to explain those motives which had induced her Ladyship

dyship to determine on so hasty a
 measure. The attachment formed
 by her son had burst on her know-
 ledge, so undreaded, so unexpected,
 that the most violent concussion of
 nature could not have overwhelm-
 ed her more ! The most con-
 vulsive throes of ambition assailed
 and agitated her soul, at the antici-
 pated consequences of an union, the
 very idea of which filled her mind
 with dismay ; and, well knowing
 the impetuosity of Lord Ormington,
 she was perfectly convinced bitter
 reproof, proud refusal, stern defi-
 ance, and, even contemptuous inter-
 diction, would only serve to inflame
 his ardent temper ; for though he
 had

had ever evinced the utmost duty and reverence, the result of principle heightened by the tie between them, she was too intimately acquainted with the vehemence of his passions, and the independent dignity of his bold, resolute, and persevering nature, to hope he would relinquish any purpose because incompetent with the views of maternal pride. She rightly supposed that the object of his present love was worthy of his every cherished wish, every tender expectation ; and she well knew his mind was fortified and governed by the strictest sense of honour ; (and though he had once yielded up the object of his heart,

on

on the altar of obedience to her, the sacrifice had been the work of her mild remonstrances, her pale, unrepublishing looks, her mild endeavours to work on his affection, with gentle, but, to his feeling soul, irresistible power; and thus she gained on his tenderness, and held him firm to her purpose: But, in this second case, she feared she knew not what evil from his uniting himself to a ward of Doringfield's.

The secrecy used by him on the subject of this connexion, which she so much dreaded, indicated, on the part of his Lordship, a calm, unshaken resolution, in which, she thought,

thought, he meditated the dissolution of maternal authority. Her proud, imbittered spirit, trembled with an indignation which she dared not openly avow ; and she contemplated, with detestation, his love for the unknown, though abhorred, Alicia ; against whom, in secret, she vowed the severest vengeance the head and heart of herself and her new ally, Mrs. Doringfield, could inflict. Her passions were high, and her pride excessive, which made her feel the want of confidence evinced by her son in the present reserve he had adopted, not with the mild, silent regret of an affectionate parent, but with the haughty resentment

sentment of an ambitious nature, disappointed of its purpose, and weakened in its empire : to establish which, was the ardent end of her most anxious labour.

The all-potent charms of gold and elevated rank, blended and united in herself, and, receiving her full merit from her own imperious opinion, and the adulation of those about her, she little dreaded the decline of power ; and still less thought, that the sceptre of her maternal authority could ever have been broken. By a late discovery she found the one shook, the other bent ; but, notwithstanding her fury, she did not
forget

forget to practise that crafty prudence and artful calmness of manner, which she thought would be most conducive to her purpose; for which reason she determined on her plan, and as instantly began to put it into execution, by engaging Mrs. Doringfield as her auxiliary in a scheme laid to divide those whose hearts were bound by every sentiment of affection, founded on the strong basis of esteem; when she met the Earl, her mild tones, and placid manner, little prepared him for the approaching storm, which it was intended should have wrecked his happiness. She presented his little niece to him, as
if

if unconscious of their former intimacy ; for the child arrived at Bellevue on the following day, accompanied by a French governess, and the female attendants who followed in the travelling coach, the Countess's post chaise.

It is impossible to describe the astonishment of his Lordship when the Countess spoke in the highest terms of approbation of Lady Darcy and her mother, both of whom, her Ladyship declared to be mighty good sort of people, and that she was very glad accident had introduced them to her notice. As to the little Lydia, she appeared to
have

have gained entire possession of her grandmother's heart ; and had she been the legitimate child of her son, the arrangements made for her education could not have been done in a superior style.

To the inquiries of Lord Ormington, as to the occasion of her sudden and unexpected return to Bellevue, her Ladyship said, that feeling her spirits and health much reduced by her late irreparable loss, the bustle of London, even at that quiet season, was more than her exhausted nerves could support ; and, as Lady Cecilia and her family were then in Derbyshire, she thought the quiet circle of her friends would be more
likely

likely to agree with her, than the number she was obliged, from her extensive connexions, to admit, during her residence in Grosvenor Square.

This pretended reason appeared a rational one, and, in the unsuspecting mind of Henry, it gained full credit. Her Ladyship continued to engage her son during the whole of the next day ; so that he found it impossible to visit Ashbourne ; and he dispatched the servant with a letter expressive of his disappointment, and declaring his intention of putting an immediate termination to the restraint under which

which he was determined no longer to exist, by boldly avowing, in the presence of his mother, an affection which would ever constitute the pride and happiness of his life.

From the representations of his friends at Heathside in favour of his choice, he hoped all that was most beneficial to his wishes. "But let the event be what it will," he added, "no power on earth can lessen the rapture of my heart, when I reflect on the transporting happiness that awaits me at the moment when I shall press thee to the fond heart of an adoring husband, from whence the fiat of death shall alone divide thee."

thee.” The gentle soul of Alicia was agitated by the demon of suspense, that most dreadful of all sensations, at the approaching crisis of her fate ; for, though the united world could not have made her harbour one surmise unfavourable to love and Henry, yet she felt so necessary would be a mother’s sanction to insure the felicity of such a son, she trembled for the result. She knew his noble nature would shrink from disobedience, though it gave into his possession the affianced bride of his heart’s fondest election. Yet so eagerly do we cling to the smallest reed of hope, every suggestion of dread gave way to the conviction of

the unbounded empire she possessed over the devoted object of her every thought. Hope, that never failing companion to the youthful breast, untutored in the lesson of disappointment, still pointed out the thread from which she continued to spin her golden dreams of unbounded felicity to come.

Mrs. Doringfield appeared to treat the ward of her husband with more than her usual attention; but, to the penetrating eye of her guardian, he thought he could trace secret inquietude and malice hidden under the smile of dissembled kindness.

Long

Long accustomed to her uncertain manner, he scarcely gave this change a moment's attention; but the circumstance which could not fail to astonish him, was the intimacy so wonderfully commenced between the haughty Countess and his wife; and some conjectures crossed his mind not altogether to the advantage of either party. However, he resolved not to express his ideas on the subject, but to leave it to chance to explain the motives from which it originated.

A lively and clear perception, such as was possessed by this amiable man, will always see the ground

it is right to choose, even before sense has maturely considered every circumstance, and reason has formed a resolution ; but when acquainted with the unexpected alteration which had taken place in the situation of little Lydia, he meekly observed, that he trusted the Almighty would watch over the little innocent, preserve her from the frowns of fortune, to which she would, perhaps, be now more exposed than if she had been permitted to remain the modest violet of his humble garden : adding, that few circumstances sour the mind so much as abused confidence ; and those in whose fate he once had been most tenderly

tenderly interested, had received too many injuries from this new-found protectress, not to make him fear for all to whom she pretended kindness. Suspicion and distrust are serpents which twine themselves round every unjust person ; and in this oblique hint of her Ladyship's sincerity, Mrs. Doringfield found her own implicated.

The fear of detection is the inseparable companion of fraud ; and that breast which has the consciousness of intending evil to others, ever dreads the scrutiny of the truly good. However, it was not her present plan to resent ; and, with the most

condescending calmness and affability, she replied ; “ Indeed, my dear, I think you will soon change your opinion of her Ladyship, who appears all condescension.”—

“ If that be the case,” the good man replied, “ I am yet open to conviction ; and if, after having known her Ladyship for so many years, I find at last I have been unjust in my ideas of her, I shall with pleasure recant and abjure all old prejudices. I am sorry to say, that I believe her Ladyship will scarcely put me to the test, for it is many years since I have been able to find favour in her sight ; and few things, during the course of my life, has filled me with more
surprize

surprize than her recent conduct to one who bears my name ; for which reason alone I should have supposed you would only have met from her contempt and insult, instead of politeness and attention. But if, on an approaching occasion, she conducts herself with that consideration and kindness due to my gentle amiable Alicia, as the destined bride of her son, I will drop the curtain of oblivion over past transactions, and once more endeavour to consider her imperious Ladyship as the daughter and sister of those I best loved on earth, and, in the felicity of their child, endeavour to forget the wrongs of my fainted friends."

“ What child ? ” replied Mrs. Doringfield, with the quickness of suspicion ; “ do you allude to the late Earl’s conduct to my dear lost Lydia ? ” The face of Doringfield was flushed with a recollection that his feelings had got the better of his prudent resolves, respecting the mystery in which the parents of Alicia had ever been wrapped ; for never to his present wife had he repeated the sorrows of those to whom Alicia owed her existence.

Finding he had gone so far in this involuntary effusion, the dictates of his warm heart, he made an evasive reply to the question his
own

own indiscretion had brought upon him, and gave the conversation a lead to that subject, so grateful to the ambitious mother; namely, the splendour of that situation in which Lady Darcy had been so fortunately established.

The morning of that day on which the agitated heart of Alicia expected the long wished, yet ever dreaded, explanation would take place, was passed by her with all the sickening anxiety and suspense which those who have felt its horrors can alone conceive. She endeavoured to divert the time by employment before the hour should arrive, her own heart had fondly pointed out, as the period

which would restore to her sight the adored form of her Henry. The page of a work in which she had been highly interested was now thrown by as most insipid ; the harp was not in tune ; and her drawings failed even for a moment to fix the attention of the anxious girl : she often walked to that part of the garden from whence the road was visible ; and as often her trembling steps were riveted to the spot where last she had received the fond adieus of Lord Ormington. The sweet recollection of those expressions of unbounded love which then fell from his lips, imparted to her mind such transporting ideas of near approach-
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ing felicity, as for the instant absorbed every thought in the gratifying certainty of being the chosen object of his tenderest affection.—At this moment she saw the groom of the Earl enter the gate which led to the offices of the parsonage; she was preparing, with the speed to which hope gave wings, to enter the house, not doubting but he was the messenger of joy; for what other sensation could she ever expect to receive from him, whom a few short days would make the husband of her heart's tenderest regard? Delight shone in her mild eyes at anticipating the contents of the packet she expected to receive; but what was

her astonishment on perceiving the man immediately return without having waited a moment ; he touched his hat as the horse on which he was mounted swiftly galloped by the gate at which she stood. She wished to have spoken to him, but the agitation of her mind prevented the power of utterance ; and the servant was out of sight before she had strength or resolution to make one inquiry respecting his Lordship. A presentiment of fast approaching misery now overpowered her, and, thickening with terror, she slowly entered the house, and, unnoticed by the family, reached her own apartment ; for, in her present state of

unaccount-

unaccountable perturbation, she felt it impossible to make any inquiries respecting the servant of Lord Ormington : at length she summoned up resolution to ring her bell, and determined to send her maid for the information she wished, yet dreaded to receive.—The girl entered at the summons, a letter in her hand, and her countenance expressive of uneasiness ; she was much attached to her mistress, and the idea of any thing which might occasion her vexation distressed herself, and took its origin in the agitated manner of Doringfield, who, after a fruitless search for Alicia, had confided the fatal letter to the care of Sally, with
a par-

a particular injunction to deliver it to her when alone, and to entreat her, for his sake, that she would endeavour to compose herself, and rely on his care, as he was already gone to the poor deceived earl, who he doubted not was the deluded victim to the blackest art and deception.

“ This,” said Sally, “ he ordered me to tell you, madam, at the very moment he mounted his horse, which was saddled directly after my Lord’s groom brought that letter from Bellevue ; and he only stopped to seal up the packet, and give it to my care, before he rode away as fast as the horse could gallop ; and with
a face

a face as white as your dress.”—

“ Gracious Heaven !” cried the agitated drooping sufferer ; “ am I then at one moment hurled from the height of exquisite happiness, to the depths of the most agonizing despair ?” It was long ere she had power to break the seal of that paper, which in her eyes appeared the death warrant of her every hope ; and when at last her trembling fingers divided the wax, the mist of sorrow prevented the contents of this eventful letter from being legible to her sight : at length she read the following lines, traced by the hand of her guardian, under the most visible anguish ; and which were hastily
penned

penned in the envelope that presented to her eager sight, the beloved and well-known characters of him her heart told her, spite of every circumstance, would ever remain the sole arbiter of her fate. — The note, “ Rouse, my amiable, my affectionate Alicia; all the resolution of your nature, on an occasion, which, like the present, requires all the exertion of fortitude and energy, which innocence like yours must inspire ! And this it is which must enable us to overcome the attacks of artful villainy ; and oh, my love ! rest firmly assured, that in the end yours will be the triumph of spotless integrity over all the fabrications of hypocritical

cal

cal malice ; for know, I have the
 blessed means in my own hands, im-
 mediately, to cover with confusion
 those who seek to injure you ; and
 speedily shall they tremble, with all
 the shame of detected wickedness,
 who have sought to injure you in the
 heart of him, who, notwithstanding
 present appearances, is most worthy
 of the rich possession of your affection.
 I fly to undeceive the abused irrita-
 bility of his nature ; and he will
 soon awake from his present deli-
 rium, and again claim the hand he
 now renounces, as the choicest bless-
 ing heaven can bestow. The day is
 near when the secret of your birth
 shall be disclosed ; and you will
 shine.

shine in a rank, exalted, as that Lord Ormington will yet share with the child of my adoption ; nor will my gentle, my forgiving Alicia, refuse to receive her precipitate lover when he shall return, and once more demand his affianced bride. The Almighty will watch over, and shower down his choicest blessings on the orphan child of my now angel friends. I have only a moment to desire, if you can summons courage sufficient for the undertaking, that you will immediately go to the castle, and demand an interview with the Countess, in which it is my wish, you should avow to her haughty Ladyship the engagement which subsists

subsists between yourself and her son ; and when she looks in the sweet face of my Alicia, conscience will whisper terrible events long since hid in the deep recesses of her guilty bosom. You will be supported by the presence of your kind Lady Cecilia, who, I will engage, shall meet you at the castle. The Earl, in all the frantic agony of passion, is pursuing his road to town, but a short conversation with me will restore him to happiness, and his Alicia. Adieu, my dearest child ! place your hope in him who never, but for his own wise purposes, suffers the wicked to succeed in their machinations."

For

For some moments the various emotions of her bosom nearly overpowered her ; and even the soothing assurances of her kind protector could not relieve her from the agony of disappointed happiness ; she gazed on the mysterious letter of Lord Ormington, and read a short sentence, expressive of contempt, coldness, and reproach. Instead of those effusions of ardent passion which had, a few days before, flowed so eloquently from his pen, each word conveyed the cruel conviction, that every pang which neglect can inflict, or ingratitude give to the heart, is doubled when it proceeds from a beloved object. Yet, at the moment

when

when she read the foul rending expressions which indignation had dictated, she bore it all with patient resignation ; nor ever, for an instant, uttered a single complaint against the cruelty of him, from whom she had expected only the harmony of love. The billet ran as follows :—“ Your want of sincerity has cost me the affections of my mother, and the certainty of everlasting misery in this life, by the destruction of my fondest hopes ; which, though formed in error, will ever hang round my heart, and embitter the existence of one, who, while he believed you to be candid and amiable, as you are beautiful and accomplished, thought the eternal fiat
of

of death should alone have torn you from his bosom ; but now, Alicia, I grieve that I have discovered, past the possibility of contradiction, that I have been the object selected by the unworthy Doringfield and yourself, as the person on whom a scene of deception was intended to be practised. I bid adieu, for ever, to a country, which contains the woman my fond soul selected as the partner of my life ; and who, notwithstanding the mask of candour, and every amiable quality, be snatched from her face, yet I shall never cease to remember, with sentiments of pity and tenderness, though I resign all that fervid passion, which would have

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sheltered

sheltered her from the storms of the world, in my arms, as the adored wife of him who cannot tolerate imposition ; or will ever more renew an engagement, which the unworthiness of the object could alone have dissolved. Adieu for ever ! repent of the arts used by yourself, and the now detested Doringfield, who is a thousand times more blameable than yourself ; and if it be any gratification to your ambition and vanity, learn, you have rendered existence detestable to Ormington."

" Great God !" cried she, with an agony of misery, while her clasped hands were wetted with the scalding

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ing tears of unutterable anguish ;

“ Is it indeed possible, have I lived to be so completely wretched ? Does my once tender and affectionate Henry doubt the regard, the fidelity of her who would this moment resign her life to convince him, she is not unworthy of that confidence it was her pride to inspire. Oh ! never, in thought, word, or deed, have I used deception to him, or any other living being ; never had I any circumstance to hide from the scrutinizing eye of an envious world, or from the knowledge of that man who was, and is, the only object of my heart’s fondest election ! The mystery attending my birth I am as

uncon-

unconscious of as he can be ; but my worthy, my respectable guardian, who never yet knowingly deceived, or uttered a falsehood, has declared it honourable, and not unworthy the rank to which my Henry would once have raised me." As the conscious reflection of her own innocence stole on her naturely placid mind, her swelling bosom' grew more serene ; a sweet composure imperceptibly spread over every sense of agony ; and, while the pious fervour of her hallowed spirit gave a beautiful glow to her pale countenance, her mild eyes were raised with humility, her beautiful hands clasped in reverence, and with the

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devotion of a seraph, chastened by the malice of a weak dependent mortal, her elevated soul breathed out a fervid prayer to Heaven, to support, guide, and protect her ; while her pure and innocent heart was in sweet communion with the friend of the friendless, an ethereal, a sacred calm diffused itself over her senses ; and a confidence, which the unaccustoming breast will feel, even in the most gloomy extremities of fate, communicated a divine consolation to her drooping soul. She felt as if some ministering being had inspired and fortified her with hope, and she arose and gave orders to the servants to send for a chaise, determined instantly

stantly to obey the commands of her first protector.

“ He,” cried she, “ who guards those that trust in him, will neither slumber nor sleep ; and though now heart broken, and a bankrupt in peace, I shall not be lost.” The heart of our heroine was composed of the finest, softest, materials ; a violent gush of tears allayed the swell of these varied conflicts, and again gave elasticity to the springs of life, which, at the first sharpened trial of keen sorrow, appeared to be fast fading from her grasp. Disappointment chilled those buds of confidence and love, which she would

have treasured in sorrow, even have cherished in death, within the warm recesses of her tender bosom. Their balmy breath would have cheered the thorny path of her life ; and had Henry been penniless, they would with him have made the poorest cottage a Paradise ; but now the soft attributes of her breast had received their deadly wound ; frigid indifference had taken place of the energy of affection ; cold suspicion, of generous confidence ; and that vivid tenderness of sentiment, which had animated her actions, was all cast back on her own heart. Those arms which she had thought would be a refuge from every storm, a
sanctuary

sanctuary from every affliction, now rejected the tender claims, and sacrificed her peace at the shrine of falsehood and calumny ; and she was left a victim to the thorns of forgotten affection ; yet, at the same moment, she felt so severely his hasty desertion, his image was fondly cherished. His conduct was palliated, was forgiven ; his rash impetuosity obliterated from her memory ; his unkind expressions erased from that bosom, in which only the recollection of his once passionate affection, the generosity of his glowing heart, and those endearing qualities which even his present treatment could not obscure, were fondly trea-

fured by remembrance. Her sorrow was deep, silent, and lasting ; and when, in the agony of recollection, she remembered that he had resigned all correspondence with her, he was no longer her's ; that never again, perhaps, she should see him smile upon her with looks of affection ; never more hear that voice, on the accents of which she could have dwelt for ever ; then, indeed, would anguish present to her those happy days as gone for ever ; and she sunk down in chilling languor, the tears of bitter regret trickling down her blanched cheek ; raising her meek pleading eye to heaven, she softly exclaimed, " I cannot, I feel I cannot

not long support his undeserved contempt, his cold indifference !”

Exertion was now necessary, for Sally entered and informed her the chaise was at the door. On going down stairs, she for the first time remembered there was on earth such a person as Mrs. Doringfield ; but she determined to treat her with that respect and confidence due to her guardian’s wife ; and opening the parlour door, she informed her of the event which demanded her appearance at the castle. Her confidence was received with haughty triumph, and taunting reproof, at her so easily giving credit to the promises of a

young man so fickle as Lord Ormington was known to be ; whom she declared she had thought had been slackening in his attentions for some time, and that it was the opinion of those who knew him well, that he had an attachment in Italy, to which place she supposed he was now gone. While she spoke, a malignant joy seemed to spread itself over her features, and, with a forced and cold civility, she wished a satisfactory determination to her difficulties.

We will now leave our poor heart-broken heroine in the carriage which was to convey her to a house she had hoped to enter under such
different

different auspices ; and, when she stopped at its proud gates, a thousand painful, yet tender, recollections rushed upon her mind, and her full bosom vented itself in tears, which, in a great measure, relieved her spirits from the extreme agitation she had endured, and prepared her better to support the scene she was about to encounter.

To return to the miserable, the deceived Lord Ormington, who had so readily caught at the bait prepared for the destruction of all the fairest prospects this life could present to his attached heart ; on the morning he had determined openly

to avow the engagement into which he had entered, a private message was dispatched to Lady Cecilia Fortescue, requesting her immediate presence at the castle. Though it was his fixed resolve no remains should impede the firm purpose of his soul with respect to Alicia ; yet he felt, that even blessed with her he adored, happiness could not gain entire possession of his breast, unless his union was sanctioned by the approbation of his only surviving parent ; and, conscious of the influence Lady Cecilia possessed on her Ladyship, he trusted to the warmth of an affection he well knew she entertained both for Miss Arundel and

and himself, as a sure stimulus for her utmost exertions on a point so essential to their mutual felicity. If deprived of her, no pleasure however alluring, no enjoyment however rich, could have charms for him; but, once secured his own, he should be master of the sweetest, the most permanent delight; “and my mother,” added he, “will, in a short time, forego the privileges of splendid alliance, exalted rank, and accumulated wealth, and receive to her arms, as the wife of her son, one who at present can only be presented to her, enriched by intellectual graces, loveliness of form, and a

heart inspired by virtue and the nicest honour."

To attend this summons, Lady Cecilia would have flown with all the interest of true affection ; but, unfortunately, she had gone that morning on particular business to Derby, from whence she was not expected to return that evening. Mr. Fortescue also had left Heathside, some public affairs having demanded his immediate attendance in London.

Henry, now determined to delay the communications he had to make
till

till he should be surrounded by friends, who could bear testimony to the virtues, the glowing beauties, of his captivating Alicia ; and, with all his passions in a ferment, and his views and wishes not perfectly direct, he would have given the world for any interruption to a *tête-à-tête* with the Countess, whose penetrating eye he fancied was fixed on him with more than her usual scrutinizing regard.

Towards his mother, Henry had ever experienced an affection, blended with awe ; and, though he gloried in his passion, he dreaded to make her Ladyship acquainted with it.

it. Notwithstanding this delicacy of hurting Lady Ormington, his impetuous soul had immutably determined to make the charming Alicia his wife, either with or without her consent. She was his mother, and he loved her ; but Alicia was a divinity, and, when his wife, must be received as her daughter. And he again resolved to defer the matter altogether till he should present her as his bride.

With this arrangement in his head they sat down to dinner ; but, as if fate had determined the little Lydia to be the destroyer of her friend's happiness, she made her
appear-

appearance at the desert, and was tenderly welcomed and careffed by the Earl, who considered the presence of the child as of the most essential use on the present occasion, it being a great relief to the consciousness of his agitated mind.

He had lately become full of anxiety, from the sudden return of her Ladyship to the castle, and the knowledge of Mrs. Doringfield having been the companion of her journey ; he did not doubt but she must have gained some information respecting his visits to Ashbourne ; and indeed the Countess's manner, during the morning, had given him
reason

reason to imagine she had some important secret at heart, which she only waited for a favourable moment to disclose.

Lydia, as she was seated on the knee of Lord Ormington, eagerly asked when he was to bring her own dear Miss Arundel to the castle to live with him ? The malign eye of her Ladyship viewed the countenance of her son askance, which was deeply suffused with the richest glow of crimson ; and, in a contemptuous tone, she desired to be informed what distinction in society *that* Miss Arundel held, who appeared to possess such fascinating attractions

attractions for the first members of her family ?

Lord Ormington had now recovered the energies] of his mind, and he replied with firmness, if your allusions point at Miss Arundel, I can only say that I have long waited for a moment favourable to the information I have to impart respecting that young lady ; who is the most amiable of her sex, and the affianced bride of your son. Allow me then, my dearest mother, to present her to you, rich in the shining qualities of worth, beauty, and accomplishments ; nor is her birth less honourable than that by which your son

is

is distinguished, though, for the present, it is wrapped in the shade of mystery, which, Doringfield assures me, will soon cease ; and that, in a connexion formed with this lovely creature, I shall derive all the advantages of rank and fortune, though for a short period I must receive her to my arms undistinguished, but by all which is most gratifying to my devoted soul,—her own unconscious graces and brilliant virtues.”—

“ Grant me patience,” cried her Ladyship, “ to explain this plan laid for the ruin of your honour, and into which your Lordship would most certainly have fallen but for the
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the fortunate circumstance that opened to my knowledge a scheme the most ambitious villany ever concerted for the advancement of his own natural daughter ! She has herself forfeited all pretensions to character, by having eloped from a situation in which he had placed her, with a young man of the most abandoned morals ; and who, after she had resided with him some months, returned her on the hands of her artful father, who has presumptuously thought the Earl of Ormington a proper dupe for his disgraceful schemes."

At

At first, the impetuous, the distracted Earl, refused all credit to so infamous a charge ; and, in the violence of contending passions, forgot for a moment the respect due to a mother. He accused her of having planned this scheme for the destruction of his everlasting happiness, swearing, by every thing most sacred, that the moment which convinced him of Alicia's guilt, would be the last in which he should ever know happiness, and that he would bid adieu to a country which contained her, who, in spite of all that could be alledged against her, must ever be dear to him, and who, he

was

was still convinced, was amiable and virtuous, as she was lovely and beloved.



It was the Countess's plan to soothe and convince the agitated mind of her frantic son ; and, after many fruitless arguments, all of which failed in their attempt to bring conviction to the mind of Lord Ormington, she told him, that finding he was still bent on his own destruction, in duty to him and to herself, she would produce vouchers of their infamy, with which, fortunately, she was prepared ; since nothing less than ocular proof could satisfy his impetuous spirit respecting

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ing the truth of circumstances, the knowledge of which she would fain have spared his feelings ; convinced as she now was of the fascinating art which had chained his senses to the disgraced daughter of his old hypocritical tutor : a man who wished to palm on him the offspring of his own shame, as the legitimate and acknowledged daughter of some house, noble as that to which his ambitious heart had hoped to transplant her ; “ and which,” added she, “ but for the interposition of a divine Providence, would have taken place ere it had been in your power to avoid the evil.”

For

For a long time he refused to look at any thing which it was possible might impeach the honour or integrity of those beings he considered as almost angelic ; but at length the prayers and entreaties of a mother prevailed ; and, in an evil hour, he consented to peruse the most infernal scrolls which the agents of premeditated wickedness ever framed for the destruction of those whose future felicity was bound up in each other.

It is needless to stain the purity of paper with the particulars of this black transaction. It originated solely in the worthless breast of Lady Ormington, and her new ally Mrs. Doring-

Doringfield ; suffice it to say, that a series of letters, fabricated for the purpose, was shewn to his credulous Lordship, and that every means which falsehood could invent, or villany counterfeit, were exhibited as proofs of the truth of assertions, which it was nearly impossible a heart so amiable as that possessed by Lord Ormington could suspect was the device of her to whom he owed his life, and the execution of one who was so closely connected to the calumniated, but truly respectable, Doringfield.

The alledged proofs of guilt consisted in a correspondence supposed

to have passed between a person who had attended on the Countess and the amiable Doringfield, when resident at Bellevue in the capacity of tutor to the Marquis of Desmond.

These letters proved the birth of Alicia, in a way in which it was scarcely possible for the cold breath of suspicion itself to doubt ; but which, unaided by other circumstances, would have failed in its effect on the fascinated heart of the Earl, who, while he could have clasped the real angelic Alicia to his beating bosom, and believed her virtuous and fondly attached to him alone, would have considered it per-

fectly immaterial whether she were herself the innocent offspring of error, or the acknowledged heiress of millions.

With such disinterested, such fervent tenderness, did he dwell on her image ; but, when he read letters addressed to a licentious villain, which breathed the very soul of passion, purporting to be the transcript of what he had thought a pure and spotless heart, what else could he believe, but that she was unworthy the attachment she had inspired by the blandishments of affected regard to him, as the ambitious views of her unworthy father ?

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These letters, addressed to Captain —, were inclosed in a letter from that pretended lover; in which, as a man of honour, he returned to the father of Miss Arundel, those proofs of the unbounded love he had received from the Lady, declaring he preferred this method to at once putting them into the fire; that the Lady might be convinced they were no longer evidences of the partiality with which she had honoured him, and which he must in future beg leave to decline, as too flattering. He added, that he begged all might be forgotten, as he was on the point of uniting himself to a most amiable and virtuous woman, whose

peace would suffer were he to continue a correspondence which could now only prove unpleasant to all parties. He ended by assuring her of his perfect gratitude, and that he should ever retain a just sense of her past kindness.

“ God of heaven !” cried the poor deceived Henry, “ is it possible that such cursed deception could stain the character of her, who, in my eyes, was all perfection ; but tell me, my mother,” wringing her hand in agony as he spoke, “ how did you gain possession of these damned letters, which now blast my every future prospect ?”—

“ My

“ My dearest Henry,” cried the machiavelian mother, who now saw the poison had taken its deadly effect, “ be calm, and I will inform you by what a wonderful interposition of Providence your own honour, and that of the two noble houses which you now represent, have been saved from the disgrace of an alliance with fraud and dishonour.”

She then, in the most soothing and affectionate manner, repeated all that art could furnish to give colour to her tale of horror; and assured the too credulous and half frantic Earl, that Mrs. Doringfield

herself had been the person who had confided to her hands the papers which had saved the destined shipwreck of her beloved son ; she had even kindly offered, should it be absolutely necessary, publicly to step forward and avow to the deceitful father and artful child, the part she had taken in the discovery of their intended plans.

In all the agony of wild despair, without allowing himself time to look into the circumstances which had annihilated his hopes, instant orders were given for his travelling carriage to be immediately prepared ; when, hastily penning the frenzied
billet

billet to Alicia, and one, nearly as incomprehensible, to his once respected tutor, he wildly bade adieu to the Countess, telling her that, in this world, it would be an eternal farewell.

Her Ladyship did not use any arguments to detain him, as the farther he was removed from the object which thus overpowered his every faculty, she thought the less reason there would be to dread a discovery of the steps which had been taken to divide them.

In two hours after he had been rendered the most wretched of created

beings, he rushed into the chaise, and was, as fast as four fleet horses could carry him; conveyed to town; agony and distraction the sole companions of his harassed mind. Rashness and impetuosity had ever been the leading features of his character, which, though blended with every virtue that could adorn humanity, had, unfortunately for his own happiness, gained too great an ascendancy over a heart fraught with the most ardent affections which ever animated the breast of man; and had he allowed himself time for reflection, the unobtruding virtues of his Alicia must have repulsed all that had dared to breathe a sentence
contrary

contrary to her angel purity ; but passion had usurped the place of reason, and, in its first transports, he acted the part of a man bereft of sense.

While the amiable object of the most atrocious deception is flying from a spot which could alone have restored peace to the deserted mansion of his once happy, but now distracted, bosom, he never stopped till he was set down in London ; where he had no sooner arrived, than, sending a few incoherent lines to the house of Mr. Fortescue, he requested to see him instantly, as he was on the point of setting off to

the continent, and had events of the most dreadful import to disclose prior to his quitting England for ever.

Unfortunately for the Earl, the servant who carried the note to Portman Square, brought it back to his Lord, as Mr. Fortescue had that morning left town, and was gone down to Yorkshire for a fortnight on a shooting party.

Had this amiable and disinterested friend happily been in the way, it is more than probable his collected ideas, and cooler judgment, would

have helped to calm the agonizing breast of the wretched Ormington ; but it was the season in which villainy was to be triumphant, and, with phrenzied impatience, he reached Dover ; the packet being on the point of failing, he took his passage alone, and unattended, but by the sweet image of his deserted love, who, in spite of the most malicious wickedness, though still, almost unconscious to himself, kept firm possession of the recesses of his agonizing heart. We will now leave him safely landed at Calais, after a stormy passage, which added to the turbulent emotions of his own agitated

L 6 mind,

mind, and all the horrors of sea sickness, had nearly made him and his sorrows find a refuge in a watery grave : a fate which, in his present state of extreme wretchedness, would have appeared desirable, as existence was now become a burden almost too heavy for him to support. He would have blessed the hand which would have shortened a life devoted to future misery ; and the bitterest pangs of never ending regret, rendered still more insufferable by the torturing remembrance of those hours of transporting bliss never more to return : hours which busy memory still delighted to dwell upon, with a
 precision,

precision, those alone who have loved with a passion fervent as that which glowed in the bosom of Henry, can paint on each trembling nerve. Alas ! we cannot at pleasure resign the load of life ! we must await with patient resignation that moment, which a wise and merciful Creator has appointed to gather us to the cold and silent regions of the grave ; that icy pillow where all the joys and sorrows of a turbulent world are alike banished from our minds ; that gloomy dwelling where the falling of the eternal curtain shuts from our knowledge all transactions of an
existence

existence teeming with grief and disappointment !

When the carriage, which conveyed Alicia, stopped before the venerable gates of Bellevue, her gentle mind struggled for the composure so requisite for a visit, that she was astonished Mr. Doringfield should have requested her at such a moment to make ; but it was his command, and she had resolved, in spite of the feelings which preyed upon her heart, to obey ; with all the recovered dignity which marked her every action, she followed the servant to the Countess's apartment,
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the drawing-room door flew open, she found herself alone, and unsupported by any thing but conscious innocence, in the presence of a haughty woman of quality, whose very name she dreaded; and had supposed, that no consideration on earth could have tempted her to enter, but under the protection, and screened in the fond arms of an adoring husband, who would, with his life, have shielded her from the arrogance of pride and prejudice. The groom of the chambers inquired by what name he should announce her to his lady; her reply was, she had business of importance with her

Lady-

Ladyship ; but that not having the honour of being personally known to the Countess, her name was immaterial. The beauty of her face, the elegance of her form, and the commanding yet softened manners which at all times was so visible in her graceful movements, removed from the man all suspicions, that her visit was of a nature to which his lady, as well as great people in general, have a most invincible objection ; namely, the being importuned by the supplications of those who require the assistance of benevolence, or the protection of power : and with the same marks of respect, he would

would have introduced any of the Countess's most ennobled visitors ; he conducted her trembling steps to the mother of her abused Lord. On her first entrance she had a moment to recover from the palpitation of her heart, for the Countess's back was to the door ; and the man advanced to the sofa on which she sat, saying, as he approached, " A lady requests to see your Ladyship at this moment." She turned, and beheld the pale and nearly motionless figure of Alicia, who, with a modest but collected air, requested to be allowed to have the honour of some moments conversation.

Lady

Lady Ormington appeared at first incapable of replying, owing to a variety of emotions which seemed nearly to suffocate her. However, one demanded her name in a tone of haughty defiance. "It is Arundel," returned the gentle culprit, taking a seat, as she added, "the same who was the contracted wife of Lord Ormington, the happy object of his tenderest affections; but now—" and sobs nearly stifled her voice as she uttered the sad reverse, "the unfortunate, the calumniated being, whom he has deserted without a cause; and when to the intolerable regrets of my own sorrow is added,

the

the fear of my being the innocent source of division between a parent and a son, it is more than I can support. Oh ! madam, restore him to your affections ; and if once he is convinced he has injured me, by suspicions injurious to honour, and that tenderness I blush not to avow for the man, whom a few short days would have made my husband, I will relinquish every claim to his heart and hand, for it is his happiness I seek ; and that again secured, I care not for myself."

The Countess, whilst the interesting pleader was thus explaining the
nature

nature of sensations which swelled the torrents of her sorrow, had continued to gaze on her lovely face with looks expressive both of horror and astonishment. Her once fine countenance bore a convincing proof, how terrific is the appearance of strong lines in the features of persons advanced in years, if they are not softened by humanity and kindness. At length, in a tone which endeavoured to appear composed, she replied, “ I have heard with surprize the declaration of those presumptuous hopes, which led you to suppose, that my son, the Earl of Ormington, could form an alliance
with

with you ! Is a nobleman, with whom royalty itself would not be disgraced, a proper object on which you and the hypocritical Doringfield should resolve to cover your own disgrace, by drawing him into snares from which he has so happily escaped ? But I must also give you both infinite credit for the pretty romantic history, which, though as yet untold, would, I doubt not, have been wonderfully ingenious ; and which, I understand, was not to have been disclosed until the child, who owes its existence to the libertine principles of that sanctified wretch, who would have grafted his
 own

own dishonour on the noble stock of a house, whose men have all been brave, and women virtuous ; and who, till this mortifying transaction, never even condescended to have a name, unfulfilled as that they bear, coupled with obscurity and meanness. You, syren, as you are, must, I am almost tempted to believe, have had recourse to magic ere my son could have acknowledged the witchery of those arts, which has induced him to disgrace himself, by ever having entertained a thought of raising one so insignificant to the distinguished rank of his wife ; but, Heaven be praised ! he has escaped the spells

spells which bound him to you; and now blushes at the recollection of having so far disgraced his own exalted station." Alicia remained a moment silent ; her tears had ceased to flow ; and, with that graceful dignity which she so eminently possessed, replied, in the calm tone of insulted innocence,—“ The mother of him I shall never cease to regard, has a right to my respect ; which to preserve, it is proper I should withdraw : but before I leave your Ladyship, allow me to declare, that the sacred memory of my angel mother, has even stronger ties on me than those which I acknowledge binds
me

me to the Countess of Ormington, who is both ungenerous and unjust, in those allusions she has permitted herself the liberty of making, so unworthy her Ladyship's character, and the honour and virtue of her to whom I owe my existence; besides the truly respectable man to whose care I am indebted for even more than life. He has instilled those principles of religion and virtue into my mind, which now enables me to support the taunts of pride and arrogance, without any other sensation than those of pity for her, who condescends to have recourse to such low means as fraud and deceit, to enable

enable her to establish the future misery of a son, who shall yet be convinced of the injustice he has been drawn in to commit. I am sorry your Ladyship has forced me to be thus explicit; but self-preservation is the first law of nature; and I doubt not, justice will yet be rendered to those you have so cruelly sought to injure by the blackest calumny." As she spoke, her natural placid temper appeared to be supported with unusual strength; fortitude made her eye vigorous; prudence intent; while truth made itself visible in the openness and simplicity with which she retorted to the male-

violent attacks of the haughty Countess. Notwithstanding the trying situation in which she found herself, she seemed composed; and even at the moment of intended humiliation, to soar far above all the attacks of oppressive persecution.

“ Upon my honour,” said Lady Ormington, gazing on her as she spoke, “ you would have played the part of a countess with much dignity; and I cannot wonder at the reluctance you display to resign a character, it must have taken you some time to study, and bring to the degree of perfection I now witness; but

but you had better at present return to your artful father, who is, I imagine, by this time convinced, that my Lord Ormington has declined the honour Mr. Doringfield intended him, when he selected this natural daughter as the future Countess of Ormington. Thanks to that worthy woman who bears your father's name, both yourself and him are now fully unmasked to that exalted character, whom you had the assurance to mark out, as the dupe to your unparalleled artifice, and consummate ambition: but now learn, all has been unraveled to his entire satisfaction; and I can only add, he despises you both from the very bot-

som of his soul." Alicia, whose
 sweet face bore a striking resem-
 blance to the white lily, bathed in
 dew, had nearly sunk insensible on
 the ground, overpowered by the cruel
 inhumanity of the mother of that
 man, who her heart fondly told her
 would still protect and love her, not-
 withstanding the successful arts
 which had been practised to rob her
 of all she prized. A thousand times
 had he vowed to shelter her from
 that haughty parent's power ; but
 now, how changed was her situation !
 despised, calumniated, and deserted
 by the object of her heart's fondest
 election ; and left alone to support
 the most cruel arrogance of usurped

authority ! These bitter reflections rushed on her mind, and for a moment banished the calm, but decided resolution of her character. Lady Ormington saw, by the change of her countenance, she was on the point of fainting ; and ringing the bell with violence, her woman was instantly summoned to recover her. The attendant, after having applied the usual restoratives, succeeded in recalling our interesting heroine back to life and misery ; but, as the crimson tide again painted her ashy cheek, the woman exclaimed, “ Gracious God, my lady ! have you forgotten my Lord Marquis ? Or did your Ladyship ever behold such a likeness

as this young lady bears to him? Sure it must."—"Hold your tongue," interrupted the offended Countess; "am I to have my feelings tortured by the remembrance of my dear lost brother, owing to your nonsensical ideas of a resemblance, which has no other foundation but your own silly imagination? Be gone; I have no further occasion for your attendance at present: order the carriage, which brought this young person, immediately to the door; for I suppose you can have no further business with me." Alicia was going to reply, when her spirits received a cordial balm in the presence of Lady Cecilia Fortescue, that kind friend from whom

whom she yet hoped to receive pity and support ; nor were the hopes she had formed of the justice and liberality of her Ladyship erroneous.

Mr. Doringfield had made a point of seeing this truly amiable woman, and to her care and tender attention had entrusted his beloved charge. The necessity of the moment obliged him to hasten the time appointed for the discovery of the true situation of Alicia ; and, under the seal of secrecy for a few days, he had confided to her the mystery of Miss Arundel's birth, and his motive for requesting she would see the Countess at the castle ; to which place, finding she

was gone, Lady Cecilia had followed and entered, at a moment when the timid persecuted girl stood most in need of the soothing consolations of friendship.

The Countess, in the most vehement terms, gave utterance to the black falsehoods she alledged against Doringfield and Alicia; Lady Cecilia, in the mild voice of truth, as she held the fair hand of the trembling culprit, which she had taken on her first entrance, and gently pressed with the affectionate kindness of friendship and protection, replied, " Allow me, Lady Ormington, to speak to you alone. I have some circumstances of importance

importance to disclose ; and flatter myself it is now in my power to open your eyes, to the errors into which your Ladyship has, I doubt not, been betrayed by the arts of the truly despicable. As to you, my love," she continued, turning to the now astonished Alicia, " from this moment you are the daughter of my adoption ; and shall share a parent's love with my Olivia. Consider my house as your home ; for never shall you re-enter that which holds the woman who has so basely calumniated you. You shall live with me until I give back the treasure his own rashness had nearly lost to him forever, to the arms of Lord Orming-

ton, who will soon be convinced of the diabolical arts practised against your mutual happiness. At the feet of his still adored love, he shall sue for that pardon I am sure you will not long refuse to grant to a repenting lover. To your Ladyship I make no apology for the part I am acting ; for when I have the honour of a conversation with you, I have such convincing proofs to produce, that an alliance with this lovely and deserving girl will be an honour to whatever family she connects herself with, that the Countess of Ormington, in particular, will readily acknowledge those claims, when the nature of them are fully ascertained ;

as

as they speedily shall be to her entire satisfaction."

The enraged peers, with all the acrimony of offended pride, retorted, "Those pretensions must, indeed, be well-founded, which could induce her to sanction with approbation the marriage of Lord Ormington with the reputed illegitimate and disgraced daughter of his governor." The fair cheeks of Miss Arundel were suffused with the burning blushes of insulted virtue; but feeling safety in the presence of the avowed champion of her innocence and integrity, she calmly replied, "That the unexpected happiness she

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felt

felt at receiving marks of such distinguishing regard from a friend so truly beloved, has inspired hopes of yet being able to counteract the machinations of those, who, to gratify their own revenge, had endeavoured at the destruction of her fondest wishes, and levelled the shafts of malice against the most amiable of mankind." "Fear not, my love," cried her kind protectress, "a short time will evince, past the possibility of doubt to Lady Ormington, that the contracted wife of her son has such indisputable ties to her attention as, I flatter myself, she will not long withhold from one who, equally with her Ladyship, is endowed with

with the highly prized distinction of blood, equally unfullied with that which flows in the veins of the descendants from the house of Malvern."

The ladies now withdrew to another apartment, and, after a few moments, Alicia was requested, by a message from Lady Cecilia, to enter her carriage, where she would soon come to her. With hasty and trembling steps she prepared to obey; happy to leave a place in which she had endured all the mortifications haughty pride and cruel insult could inflict: on crossing the hall, she saw her former little favourite, and the
innocent

innocent cause of the heart-rending sorrows which oppressed her.

The child no sooner caught a sight of her well-remembered Miss Arundel, than, with all the joy of infantine delight, she clung round the sweet form of her she had so materially injured ; nor would she be prevailed on, by the entreaties of her governess, to quit her till Lady Cecilia joined her in the carriage. This amiable woman, with all the warmth affection could inspire, now assured her sweet protégée, that she would never more lose sight of her till she was reclaimed by a power, they should neither, she hoped, be inclined

clined to dispute ; and, with a tone indicative of every thing most soothing, she assured her a very short time would make the Countess of Ormington as anxious to receive her for a daughter as she had before been violent against such a connexion.

“ But,” added her Ladyship, “ it is a serious undertaking to convince some people there is a possibility of their being in the wrong ; and, I really believe, my sister-in-law is of that haughty and unbending disposition, that she would sooner die than acknowledge herself in an error ; but I have undertaken to convince her of the injustice of her present conduct ;

duct ; and I believe I shall in time
 succeed, in weeding out some an-
 cient prejudices, in harbouring of
 which how many beautiful flowers
 does she throw from her ! In this
 age of profligacy, how poor is our ac-
 quirement of wisdom ! Did we indeed
 advance in virtue, then progression
 of time, which every day discloses
 to our eyes the inexhaustible stores of
 knowledge and of science, might be
 of inestimable value ; but, like the
 ungrateful swine which devours the
 acorn with greediness, the Countess
 shuts her eyes on truth, and ceasing
 to look up to the oak from whence
 she receives the blessing, forgets the
 cause and end of the gift. Now, my
 dear,

dear, we must arrange our little plan ; for in future you are my guest, and never but under my protection shall you enter the house of that despicable Mrs. Doringfield, who has been the contriver and abettor of a diabolical scheme, which that God who watches over the innocent and the oppressed has so amply put in my power to refute. Doringfield is gone to town in pursuit of my precipitate nephew ; and I trust the explanation he is about to give will restore you to the full possession of his heart. Till that period, you have in me a mother's arms to shelter you from the malice of your enemies. None will dare to persecute the avowed

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ed object of my tenderness; one whom I shall ever regard as the sister of my Olivia, who will, with the truest sympathy, share in those sorrows which the deceit of others have brought upon you; and you cannot but feel soothed by the unceasing attentions and affectionate gentleness of your young friend.”—

“ Ah !” cried the grateful Alicia;
 “ can I repine at any circumstance which has blessed me with such disinterested, such unmerited goodness ? Never can I find expressions sufficiently forcible in which to convey my thanks for humanity so exalted ! I bless you for the hope you hold
 out,

out, that it will yet be allowed me to undeceive my ever beloved and once confiding Henry ; and to convince him, that his Alicia is not the despicable character he has been taught to believe. If this blessing is ever granted to my prayers, can I ever lament the event, cruel as it is, which has brought the conviction that adversity is the true touchstone of friendship ; and that, in your Ladyship's goodness, I have discovered that cordial drop which sweetens the bitter draught of misfortune ! Ah, never can I be sufficiently grateful for such an interposition in my favour. You appeared, my revered friend," she continued, " during your visit to
the

the Countess, to be fully acquainted with the secret of my birth ; will you not pity my anxiety on that account, and give me the satisfaction of knowing who it really is you honour so entirely with your approbation and affection.”—“ Till I hear from or see our worthy friend,” said her Ladyship, “ you must pardon my granting this, I must say, reasonable request. Lady Ormington already knows you by that name to which you have an undoubted right, and a little time will put you in possession of the rank and fortune which is no longer in the power of your enemies to deprive you of at present. Satisfy yourself with the certainty

certainly of soon becoming Countess of Ormington, and the adored wife of our misguided, rash Henry.”—

“ Ah !” exclaimed the agitated girl, “ how sweet is this hope so kindly held out to heal my harassed spirits ! Oh, say in what way I can ever repay such condescending goodness ?”

The carriage now stopped at the door of her ladyship’s magnificent house, where our interesting heroine was warmly welcomed and tenderly received to the liberal hearts of its generous owner and amiable daughter.

A mes-

A message was dispatched to the parsonage of Ashbourne, demanding the immediate attendance of Alicia's servant, who was ordered to bring all her clothes to Heathside: at the same time information was sent to Mrs. Doringfield, that, in future, Miss Arundel would take up her abode with Lady Cecilia Fortescue. When the groom, who was the bearer of these orders, approached the house, he saw a post-chaise and four standing at the door, into which Mrs. Doringfield entered, and the postilions took the road to London.

Sally was not long in obeying the
summons

summons to join her fair mistress ; for the confusion which reigned at the parsonage had not passed unobserved by this attentive creature. She could not with justice be classed with the common herd of servants ; for she almost worshipped Alicia, and was nearly over-powered with joy, when she received the command to follow her to the house of her amiable protectress.

As soon as the ladies heard of Sally's arrival, she was desired to make her appearance in the drawing-room, in order to give all the intelligence she could respecting what
 had

had passed at Ashbourne after the departure of Doringfield and Alicia.

“ Dear me,” cried the good creature, “ I do verily believe, if ever there was a devil under the form of a woman, it is Mrs. Doringfield. However, in the end, I believe she will meet a punishment for all her wickedness ; for now she is completely routed out from the parsonage, and I hope her worthy husband will never let her take root in it again.”—“ Gone from the house !” cried Alicia ; “ can it indeed be possible that I am the unhappy cause of so much domestic uneasiness to my
good,

good, my generous guardian, who reaps only uneasiness for all the kindness he has showered on my head, since that (for him,) unfortunate hour in which I was committed to his care ?”

“ La, Miss !” replied Sally, “ I am sure you need not fret because he has got rid of her, for he has never been the same gentleman as he was before he married her ; and, now she is packed off, bag and baggage, to her fine lady of a daughter, who is every bit as bad as herself, I hope we shall have a little peace and quietness again, as we used to have in the time of that blessed angel who is now in heaven.” — “ But

tell me," cried Alicia, in much agitation, " how you came to know Mrs. Doringfield had been banished the house of my guardian?"—" Why, madam, you had not been gone half an hour, when a message came express from Derby, with a letter from Mr. Doringfield to his wife ; and, on reading it, she put herself into a violent passion ; and as she was in her own room, and I was putting your things to rights, I heard her calling both you and Mr. Doringfield an hundred names ; and she vowed she would not stop a moment longer in the house, but ordered Mary to pack up all that belonged to her, for she would go immediately

ately to her dear daughter, Lady Darcy, and never have any thing more to say to either of you : and so John was sent for a chaise ; and, as soon as she rummaged up all she could get, off she went and took Mary with her ; and a good riddance it was, I am sure, for all that was left behind. As soon as she was quite out of sight, I went into her room to see if she had left any thing behind in her hurry, that I might put it away ; for the other maids were busy, and I told them I would help them a bit up stairs : so, in looking about, I found a letter, all crumpled and squeezed together, and thrown into the fire-place ; and I

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thought,

thought, somehow, it looked like the one which had caused all this flutter. I opened it, and sure enough it was from Mr. Doringfield ! and here it is ; for I thought it better to put it into my own pocket, than to leave it about for the other servants to read."

She then gave the letter to Alicia ; and as both herself and the ladies were impatient to see if it contained any new discoveries, they dismissed Sally, and hastened to peruse the epistle of Doringfield to his unworthy wife. It contained the most cutting reproaches at the discovered wickedness of those plans formed to blacken the
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the character of himself and his innocent and beloved ward ; assuring her, that after the proofs he had seen of the determined wickedness of her conduct, he could never more consent to see one, the atrocity of whose behaviour must ever place an insurmountable bar between them, unless years of penitence and a full confession of her crimes, should entitle her to solicit forgiveness of God and man.

The letters sent to him by Lord Ormington, and which the Countess declared were delivered into her hands by this female machiavelian, were an incontestible proof of the diabolical

act, to which the darkest passions that ever disgraced the breast of woman had given birth; and he concluded his letter with informing her, that any farther schemes on the same subject would be as abortive, as her former endeavours had been for a very short time prosperous. He added, that he would introduce Miss Arundel to the world, in a character which would add the splendour of rank and fortune to the attributes of innocence and virtue, and heap confusion and remorse on the heads of all those who would have oppressed her by the forgeries of calumny and falsehood. He ended by saying, that business of importance
would

would detain him some days in London, and, on his return to Derbyshire, he should expect to find his house evacuated by that woman whom he never more should acknowledge as his wife.

The perusal of this letter filled the gentle heart of Alicia with many additional pangs to those which already oppressed her agitated spirits : to be the cause of separation between those so nearly connected to each other, was more than she could well support ; and it was long before the affectionate soothing of her truly estimable friends could bring her to a just sense of the great relief Doring-

field would find on being separated from a woman so unworthy the respectable station she held as the mistress of his family.

It was late before the little trio separated for the night; and Lady Cecilia and Miss Fortescue conducted the now composed Alicia to her apartment: on bidding her good night, her Ladyship kissed her with the affection of a mother, saying, “ God bless you, my sweet persecuted love ! Now you are once under the protection of this roof, I trust the Almighty will guard you from future trials. Sleep well, and remember the spirit of a fainted mother

ther will; perhaps, hover round and bless the entrance of a beloved child to the abode of peace and friendship."

As she uttered this in a voice which appeared more than usually solemn, the already softened heart of Alicia threw from the fountain of her mild eyes the pearly drops of liquid tenderness; she returned the kind embraces of the friend so providentially raised to protect and support her in the hour of trial, with all the fervour so congenial to her nature.

The transactions of the preceding

N 5

day

day had furnished too many agonizing remembrances to allow sleep ; and, in the silent and undisturbed hour of rest, she had full leisure to recollect with gratitude the numerous causes she had, even at the moment when the most severe afflictions nearly overpowered her, to bless the hand, which, though it inflicted, meliorated the cruel stroke, by the interference of a friend so truly respectable as was the benevolent aunt of him whose rash impetuosity had planted in her gentle bosom (the kingdom in which his image reigned with despotic sway,) the sharpest thorns of cold suspicion and bitter unmerited reproach ;
 which

which still continued to inflict the severest pangs on that seat of innocence and virtue. Yet, in the dear, delightful hope of one day being restored to his affections, she at length suffered his beloved idea gradually to give place to that authority which neither the miserable nor the happy have the power to resist. In sweet and tranquil dreams she was again united to the sovereign of her soul; and awoke next morning refreshed.

At breakfast Lady Cecilia informed her, that Doringfield had promised, should his stay in London be prolonged, to transmit from thence the melancholy history of

those to whom she owed her being ; but as his return would depend on his having overtaken the Earl, whom he meant to follow, it was impossible to guess how long it might be before he could arrange the promised little narrative for the perusal of the beloved child of his adoption, and that kind friend to whom he had already disclosed her true situation.

Tediously did the hours pass till the anxiously-expected post brought the so ardently desired letter. Three days had elapsed, and every carriage which crossed the road was observed with delightful expectation, hoping it would restore Lord Ormington to
hap-

happiness and Alicia. Frequent and repeated were the disappointments which awaited her agitated spirits. A thousand fears had nearly banished the sweet hope of a speedy reunion, when, as the little party sat at breakfast on the fifth day, the bag from the Post Office was presented to Lady Cecilia. With trembling impatience the eager eye of Alicia saw, among other letters, one directed in the hand-writing of her guardian: but, alas ! that which could alone have brought transport was not visible in the number of those which were now thrown on the table. The scarcely less interested friend broke the seal, and read as follows :

“ I had

“ I had hoped, my dear madam, ere this, to have been the messenger of happiness to our present, I fear, unhappy Alicia, whom your Ladyship has so kindly received to the shelter of your protection ; but all my endeavours to overtake Lord Ormington have, as yet, proved ineffectual. On my arrival in London, I immediately proceeded to Grosvenor Square, and was informed by the porter, his Lordship had not remained two hours in town, and was gone to Dover on his way to France : to Dover I immediately proceeded ; and, on my alighting at the York Hotel, was told he had arrived late at night, and the packet being

being on the point of sailing, he had embarked in less than half an hour, and, in all probability, must have reached Calais many hours prior to my arrival. In this case, I thought it would be needless to extend my pursuit at present ; and, having dispatched letters after him, addressed them to Paris and other places at which I think it likely he may stop, I returned to London, in the hope of learning from Mr. Fortescue to what town he had intended going. Here again I met a second disappointment ; for your son, I understand, is not at present in town, or expected, his porter informed me, for a fortnight at least. So
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we must now wait with patience till this amiable, but rash, young man gives us some clue by which we may direct our endeavours to restore to him his lost peace of mind, which has been, like that of his unfortunate uncle, the victim of deception and duplicity. May the Almighty preserve him from the wretchedness which marked the life of my never to be forgotten friends ! I shall soon have the honour of conveying my personal acknowledgements to the benevolent kindness your Ladyship has evinced by so actively patronizing the lovely but almost friendless orphan of a distinguished house. The time will shortly arrive when I shall

shall no longer think it necessary to hide from Alicia those particulars which will, I well know, fill her tender bosom with filial sorrow ; as I think it will be less trying to her in the perusal, than were I to repeat the circumstances. I will, on my return home, which I propose reaching in a few days, do myself the honour to present into your hands the transcript of sufferings from which, I trust, our dear charge will be exempt ; and which have been but seldom equalled, never excelled, in the annals of human griefs. With every sentiment of gratitude and respect, &c. &c. &c.”

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To describe the various conflicts which shook the heart of our heroine, is impossible ; and their nature can only be fully entered into by that mind, who, within sight of long-expected happiness, has found itself suddenly, and in the most unaccountable manner, dashed from all these high-raised hopes, and divided for ever from that person in whom it appeared to centre.

Every expectation of convincing Lord Ormington of the injustice he had done her by the suspicions he had imbibed against her fidelity and truth, vanished in the dreadful certainty that, to avoid the trouble and
 impor-

importunity of explanations and expostulations, he intended to keep the place of his retirement secret from all those who might have the power or the inclination to endeavour to bring him to a sense of the error of his conduct, by having condemned, unheard, those who had never given him cause to doubt their probity, and whose honour could bear the scrutiny of the most prejudiced. Unassuming as beautiful, the gentle as amiable Alicia was already become the universal favourite of the circle in which Lady Cecilia moved. The dependants almost adored her sweet humility of manners, and the neighbouring poor had received marks of

of

of the natural benevolence of her heart. Her Ladyship endeavoured to flatter her with the hope that the letters which had been dispatched would speedily overtake her wandering lover, and that she had every reason for consolation the nature of her situation could admit.

She appeared sensible of, and grateful for, the soothing sympathy of her friends; and she strove to convince her heart all would yet be well, and that even if she should never more behold him whose image is ever foremost in her thoughts, he would in time at least acknowledge the cruel injustice he had been guilty

guilty of, by harbouring suspicions so injurious to the rectitude of her principles.

Some days had elapsed, and yet no news of either the Earl or Doringfield. One evening Alicia went into the garden to enjoy a walk, unaccompanied by either of her kind friends. She bent her pensive steps towards the avenue leading to the park, the boundaries of which were marked by a silver line, for the moon-beams sparkled on the river Trent, with which it was encircled. The remembrance of the last moment of delight she had spent in the society of her still loved Ormington, presented

presented itself to her mind with all the agonizing recollections with which it was ever attended. It was on a night similar to the present he had said, " When next, my love, the moon rises in its present splendour, nothing on earth will have power to divide us from each other."

The dreadful reverse of her present situation nearly got the better of all the philosophy she had endeavoured to acquire; and the bitter tears of well-remembered happiness, passed, she thought, never to return, chased each other over her once blooming cheek, now faded by the canker-worm at her heart. Silent

forrow preyed on her delicate frame ; her nights were spent without the relief of sleep to her wearied eyes ; society became painful ; and it was only the gratitude she felt to her anxiously attentive friends, which could have roused her to the slightest exertion. The same sweet smile would yet at times dimple round her mouth ; she spoke, she sang, but in a manner, which even more forcibly than silence could have done, discovered peace was fled from the mansion of her bosom. That voice which was ever the soul of harmony, now became more soft and feeble ; the correct vivacity of her conversation was obscured ; and nothing

thing appeared to convey satisfaction to her breast, but undisturbed solitude. All these symptoms had not passed unnoticed by Lady Cecilia, who, anxious lest grief should fix her throne in the heart of her amiable favourite, wrote to Doringfield, requesting his immediate return, as she had many fears respecting the health of his lovely ward. Miss Arundel had observed, that for the last two or three days the name of Lord Ormington had ceased to be mentioned in her presence, and that letters were continually exchanged between the Countess, Lady Cecilia, and her guardian. Perfectly satisfied, those so tenderly interested

in

in her happiness, as were the two latter, would hide nothing from her knowledge which could give her pleasure, she endeavoured to vanquish the curiosity these mysterious proceedings occasioned, and await, in patient silence, whatever affliction was yet in store for her. On entering the house from her solitary evening ramble, she was met by the affectionate Olivia, who informed her Mr. Doringfield was closeted with her mother. At this unexpected news a variety of emotions had nearly overpowered her ; and her fair friend beheld, with sorrow, the increasing weakness, which daily made her less able to support, that anxious

state of suspense she was in all probability ordained to suffer for a lengthened space of time. To the gentle consolations offered by Miss Fortescue, she calmly replied, "The arrival of my guardian recalls those days of happiness which are fled for ever. Of this I am convinced by the silence you all observe respecting Lord Ormington, and which assures me, past a possibility of doubt, that I am doomed to a life of wretchedness and sorrow. Tell me, dearest Olivia, in pity tell me! the most horrid certainty will be a state of bliss, compared with the intolerable suspense to which, for many days, I have been the victim." "Sweet girl,

girl, believe me, I know nothing respecting Henry; it is true, his mother is half frantic at not having heard of him since he left Bellevue, in a state bordering on madness; and till some certain accounts be received, it is mama's tenderness for you, that induced us to drop a subject which could only serve to recall him to your remembrance."

—"Recall him! did you say? Ah! believe me, Olivia, never for a moment is he absent from my heart."—"I know it well, my dearest cousin, for such, in spite of present appearances, I am sure you will yet be; so look forward with hope, as I do, to future days of happiness. Your Henry I have

known from infancy ; he is good and generous, but, I must own, rash and precipitate." — The simple word *your Henry*, uttered by her who had ever been considered as a sister by the man in whom her happiness centered, for the moment cheered Alicia's doubting soul ; but the conviction of the justice of her remark, when she hinted at the determination of character she so well knew he possessed, banished every flattering idea ; and she could only say, " Ah ! if he could but know the sufferings his conduct has inflicted." — " My dear," interrupted her more penetrating friend, " you little know the obstinate firmness of the sex ; for I verily believe,

believe, was Ormington sensible of the anxiety his absence occasions you, he would even fly still further from us.”—“ Oh no! that idea is totally incompatible with the affectionate generosity of his character.”—“ You must not judge of men, either from your own heart, nor yet from the delineation of their characters, as drawn by your favourite authors, simple girl! Believe me when I tell you, that passionate and vehement cousin of mine will, if I know him right, have some trouble to forgive your innocence.”—“ My God! how is that possible? in the whole transaction he cannot be deemed culpable; to him I was
 repre-

represented as criminal.”—“ You are a sweet, generous advocate for this runaway knight of yours, who, when once convinced of the injustice he has been guilty of, will feel self-love implicated in the business; and the very idea of what others will think of his headstrong folly, may be the means for some time of keeping from you. Very few of these lords of the creation have the grace to confess, it is ever possible their wisdom could be misled, even in the most trivial point, however complying, moderate, and gentle, they may appear.”—“ Indeed, Olivia, you injure him; for Lord Ormington is all that is noble, generous, and good.”

—“ Oh, . .

—“ Oh, certainly ! his Lordship is as well as most ; but believe me he has his faults like other people ; though, when with you, and gazing on the charms which first won his attention ; or listening to the melodious sounds of your sweet voice, he felt no other passion but love and self-approbation, at having inspired you with a tenderness equal to that which filled his own breast ; his vanity was flattered at having discovered your merit, and succeeding in making you sensible of that which he possesses :—but now the case is altered ; and before he can hope for pardon, he must acknowledge the error of his conduct, and bend his
 haughty

haughty spirit to ask forgiveness of
the sweet creature he has injured by
his suspicions."

END OF VOL. II.



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